

Fliers and signs alert the public that a dog is lost, missing, or stolen. They encourage sighting calls from people who think they've seen the dog, and from others who might see it in the future.

See "SIGHTING CALLS" document. Start the task of making notices for a missing pet immediately.

There are many kind-hearted people willing to help you, but they need to know what to do and how to do it. You must make it easy for them to match a "stray" dog they've seen to the description you've provided. Creating a notice that will grab attention is simple, yet the design and layout can *hinder* a search effort. Focus on important details, limit non-essential words, and omit the distractions of fancy graphics and borders. By sizing information, you can make use of all the available space and avoid crowding text into the margins. Signs and fliers will not work hard for you, *or your dog*, if largely ignored due to legibility or poor placement.

Check with local authorities to see if there are ordinances that specifically prohibit posts on utility poles.

If you can't post on poles, inquire about realtor-type signs that you can stake in the ground.

You need permission of landowners *before* posting on private property. **Never use nails to post on trees.**

Highlight a map to show where you set signs and distributed fliers, *especially* if you're unfamiliar with the area.

If setting a large number of notices, buy a small, upholstery-type staple gun - using thumbtacks is laborious.

The easiest tool to use is a hammer-tacker, using ¼" T50 staples (found in the hardware section of stores).

Post fliers or signs on metal utility poles using heavy-duty tape (clear packaging or duct).

Work to stay ahead of a lost dog. Concentrate on getting signs up quickly, posting them at *key* spots in *at least* a 3-mile radius from where the dog was seen last. No sightings? Pick locations *further* out and put up *more* signs. They cover a wide area and will buy you some time to get fliers distributed on a door to door basis.

CREATE SIGNS using "neon poster board" (heavy 11 x 14 paper in fluorescent colors) and a magic marker.

Many people are not breed savvy, and your dog (purebred or mixed) may not be easily recognized by the public.

Carefully choose what few words would best describe your dog to a stranger. Fewer words and large print maximizes impact. Letters and numbers should be plain, bold, and CAPITALIZED - just like traffic signage.

List basic details and provide phone numbers (with area codes) where people can reach you. Cell phones are more likely to be answered on a 24/7 basis and usually the first contact number listed. People with sighting information will try calling local numbers before those that look like long distance. Identify home and cell phone numbers with a prefix such as "C" or "H." If listing "toll-free" or "call-collect" numbers, describe them as such.

3 BASIC EXAMPLES OF SIGNS

- LOST DOG BEAGLE SEEN HER? DON'T CHASE Cell 508 208-XXXX Home 508 589-XXXX
- LOST DOG TERRIER SMALL BROWN PERKY EARS DON'T CHASE Cell 508 208-XXXX
- LOST DOG LARGE WHITE BLUE COLLAR SEEN HIM? C 508 208-XXXX H 508 589-XXXX

Signs not only alert residents, they reach out to *non-residents* who travel through the area on a routine basis.

Signs, highly visible and easy to read, allow drivers to jot down information and call you using their cell phones.

Excessively large signs will flop over or blow away in bad weather and you'll waste valuable time re-doing them.

It's hard to think clearly when your dog is lost, but *try* your best to work methodically when setting signs.

Carefully choose utility poles easily seen by the majority of traffic, be it vehicular or pedestrian.

Positioning is important - people in vehicles should be able to read most of a sign *before* they drive past it.

Set signs to face oncoming traffic at a chest-high level that's easy to read from a small car or a big SUV.

Don't wrap signs *around* the utility poles - place them to lay flat and readable, *then* tack them down securely.

Staple a picture or a picture-flier of your dog below signs at key locations within an established search area.

Don't post on poles that have fire alarm boxes or "sensitive" signage (such as those found in historic districts).

Avoid posting on high-speed roads, bridges, on curves, and other treacherous spots. Post just before or right at intersections, then as needed on long roads. Drive around to see how well *you* can read the signs – it is a big deal.

CREATE FLIERS on standard letter-sized paper (8 ½ x 11) using a color picture and the shortest, most exact description of the dog. Every dog is special, so flier layouts will vary. See “**SAMPLE FLIER**” - a basic design. **A good flier makes it easy for people to focus on small details and helps them remember key information.** Omit unnecessary words and punctuation marks. List distinctive details or critical information such as: “**POINTY EARS**” “**WAS WEARING RED BANDANA**” “**DEAF**” “**NEEDS DAILY MEDICATION**” Constant exposure to sunlight can make colors fade quickly - use black ink for text so words don’t “disappear.” Fliers inserted in clear (not satin) sheet protectors (open side down) will last longer in wet weather. Consider creating fliers in a second language if the area has a high percentage of residents who are bilingual.

Phone calls get the word out quickly, but people really need a hard copy of your flier to look at and refer to. Fliers are used as a “handout” for animal control officers, shelters, veterinarians, residents, and businesses. Fliers are mailed, emailed, tacked on bulletin boards, taped to store windows, and posted in a variety of places. Lost pet fliers are often seen on utility poles, but it’s very difficult to read the small print from inside a vehicle, especially one that is *moving*! It’s better to post a sign and tack the dog’s picture or picture-flier underneath it. **It is not legal to stuff fliers inside U.S. Postal Service mailboxes** - they’re for processed/stamped mail only. You may place or tape a flier anywhere *outside* of the box, or put it inside a newspaper bin.

The following information should be included on a flier, generally in the order given below:

\$ REWARD A reward with or without a dollar amount is generally either the first or the last line on notices. Don’t assume a reward will guarantee a pet’s safety or assure a speedy return to its rightful home. It *might*. A reward flier can get people too excited and motivate them just a little too much, especially the select few who care mostly about the money. A reward tells people your dog means a lot to you, BUT it also does a great job of encouraging people to chase your dog. Sighting calls *might* increase, but that’s usually due to your hard work. Many people decline to take reward money – they are just happy to have helped you get your dog back. Try using a phrase that will discourage people chasing your dog. Examples: “**REWARD FOR INFORMATION ONLY**” or “**REWARD IS STRICTLY FOR INFORMATION LEADING TO OUR DOG’S SAFE RETURN.**” A reward *may* entice someone to call with information on your dog’s whereabouts, or to tell you that it is alive, safe, and well. If someone finds your dog, likes it and wants to keep it, and THEN sees your reward flier, you might get your dog back if you aren’t pre-judged as a “bad” owner for allowing your pet to get lost. Be aware of scam artists who *claim* to have your dog, but don’t, and the idiots who think it’s “fun” to make a crank call - verify information and never assume the worst. Don’t fret too much about the reward – some will think your reward amount is too low (dog not worth much to you) or too high (maybe they should find and keep your expensive dog). You can also insert the phrase “**NO QUESTIONS ASKED**” on the flier whether you offer a reward or don’t.

LOST DOG The words “**LOST DOG**” should be centered at the top of a flier in large, **bold**, capitalized letters. Lost, Missing, or Stolen? Unless you know for sure, use the word “lost” - it’s shorter and gets the point across.

PICTURE A close-up, full-bodied, clear *color* photo of your dog in a standing position is preferable, and using *any* picture is better than none. Don’t enlarge or downsize a photo so that it’s fuzzy and hard to see. Balance the final size of a picture with the space required by “need to know” information that *must* be included on the flier. Sometimes it’s wise to reflect the dog’s size more accurately by using a picture of it with a person. If using two pictures, place them side-by-side. List any details not clearly shown but easy to see on the dog - for instance: “**WHITE TIP ON TAIL.**” Explain major changes in the dog’s *current* appearance from the flier picture, such as: “**SHORT HAIR – SHAVED FOR SUMMER.**” If your dog is still missing but its hair has had time to grown back, edit out “shaved for summer.” Using a picture of your dog wearing a *red* collar might need editing - for example: “**WEARING GREEN COLLAR WHEN LOST.**” Create a composite page using several pictures of your dog shown from different angles and poses. Carry it with you and show it to everyone. If you don’t have any pictures, the public will need help forming an “image.” The flier can include more details than normal or you can use the photo of a dog that looks *very* similar and then put: “**This is NOT “**BARNEY**” but LOOKS like him.**” You can make a composite using pictures of dogs that look like Barney. When showing it to people, point out all differences and similarities between the other dogs and Barney so there’s no confusion as to what your dog really looks like.

DON'T CHASE Lost dogs are constantly being chased. Put “**DO NOT CHASE**” on fliers. You don't want your dog to run into the street and be hit by a car, or feel threatened and move further away from the search area.

DETAILS

- **Dog's Name** A dog's name gives a personal touch, but someone might take advantage of the information. **Don't put “responds to”** Many lost dogs don't respond to strangers and often run *away* from the attention.
- **Breed** List the breed or the top two if it's a mix. Put what *best* describes your dog to a stranger, such as: “SMALL BROWN BENJI.” Don't use the term “*rare breed*” - someone might keep your “special” dog.
- **Age** Not critical except if it's elderly or a young puppy - both might make a dog more noticeable.
- **Weight** Not critical, but can be listed. Do put a term like “tiny” or “X-large.”
- **Coat Color/s** List *major* colors, describe if using terms like “merle,” and include *distinctive* markings.
- **Coat Type** List the dog's coat type if it's a distinguishing feature and it makes a big difference.
- **Sex** Not critical, but can be listed. Male, Female, Neutered Male or Spayed Female
- **Collar, leash, or harness** Describe basic color/s. * Collars can get dirty and worn, loose and *lost*. Never assume the dog is still wearing a collar or that people will see it - they may not even see a leash.
- **Tags, Tattoo, and Microchip** List out-of-state tags – current, expired or outdated (license, rabies, ID) as: “MA LICENSE tag” “OLD NJ ID tag” “OLD NY RABIES tag.” **ASAP** - call anyone (city/town clerk, vet, or shelter) who issued tags to tell them your dog is lost and give them your current 24/7 phone number and address. Many “found” dogs have tags with unreadable or outdated information, which hinders or prohibits tracing their guardians. Including information that a dog is tattooed or microchipped may deter possible theft or possession, BUT provide identification numbers *only* to those who need to know. * A detail should be withheld from public knowledge and used as an “identifier” in case someone calls to say he or she has your pet in their possession.

NOTE! Animal control officers, shelters, vet clinics, humane societies, and rescue groups must know EVERYTHING about your dog, including: age, breed, microchip/tattoo ID's, tags, scars, handicaps, etc.

DATE/LOCATION Omit the date and location where a dog was lost on fliers to be posted in public. People assume it's easy to find a lost dog, tend to ignore fliers that have “old” dates, and are quick to judge a dog's chances of survival by how long it's been missing. Specifying locations restricts using a current flier in new sighting areas. Norton residents will not be on the lookout for a dog that's lost a mile away in the city of Attleboro.

PHONE NUMBERS Make it easy to contact you by listing at least two numbers, including area codes. The first number should be that of your cell phone - *if* you leave it on and can take calls on a 24/7 basis. Carry the cell phone with you at all times and keep its battery fully charged. If you have a spare battery, keep it charged and close by. Don't list the number for a shelter or vet clinic as a contact, except in special circumstances. Someone trying to call you should not get the message machine for an office that's closed. Put “CALL IMMEDIATELY” or “CALL ASAP” next to phone numbers. You can also insert “24 HRS A DAY” or “CALL ANY HOUR.” Most people want to talk to a live person and some *will* hang up if they get an answering machine or voice mail recording. Encourage callers to stay on the line by changing the pre-recorded messages on ALL phones listed as contact numbers. Suggestion: “Hello...if you're calling about our lost dog ‘Barney,’ *thank you!* We need the day/time/street and nearest cross street, or exact location you saw him. We would appreciate it if you also leave your number in case we have a question.” Thank you for caring.” Check your messages *frequently*; calls come in when you *least* expect them.

****FLIER DISTRIBUTION****

Start making a list of police departments, animal control and humane officers, dog wardens, animal shelters, vets, humane societies, rescue groups and others you notify about your lost dog. Include names, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, dates of contact, and any other information that may be pertinent.

A list is a necessity and will help make the “Thank You” process much easier when your search is over.

Immediately give a picture-flier with a full description to all local Animal Control Officers and shelters.

Loose dogs can cause traffic accidents. **ASAP - Police and fire stations and the nearest state police barracks.**

Distribute fliers to everyone involved with animals on a routine basis, including, but not limited to:

Veterinarian hospitals and clinics, humane and rescue groups, kennels, breeders, groomers, dog daycare, pet stores, pet sitters, dog trainers, and feed & grain stores. (First locally, then border communities, and further as needed.)

Dogs are attracted by odors that *you* don't smell and repeatedly visit dumpsters and rubbish holding areas.

Visit all fast food establishments, restaurants, picnic areas, campgrounds, country clubs, amusement parks, convenience stores, and doughnut shops. Stop by every establishment with a kitchen facility. At places that cook and/or serve food, ask to talk with the person (chef or kitchen staff member) who discards the trash and leftovers. Post at rubbish transfer/recycling stations, and dumps/landfills, so both the employees and residential users see it. Tape a flier to your trashcan and the recycling bin for the collectors to put inside their trucks.

Ask to speak with the owner, manager, or person in charge when distributing fliers to businesses or organizations. When not prohibited by corporate policy (or the owner) you should post a flier where the majority of customers will see it, ideally placed at eye level. Ask if a second flier can be posted where all the employees will see it, like near a time clock or in a cafeteria. Keep a supply of fliers, pens, small notepad, tacks, and scotch tape in your car.

Fliers should be delivered to:

Local, state, and federal government agencies that have workers who maintain roads and state highways, such as: Department of Transportation (DOT) and Division of Public Works (DPW).

Local, state, and national parks, wildlife refuges, sanctuaries, and zoos.

Maintenance, and Buildings and Grounds supervisors of schools, government centers, and institutions.

School districts, school bus drivers, athletic fields, and all recreation facilities.

Post Office bulletin boards (if allowed), back room sorting operations, and mail carriers.

Utility companies (phone, cable, electric, water, and gas), and the field workers who install or repair equipment.

Construction crews of planned communities and subdivisions, landscapers, and others who work outdoors.

Stores: Video, liquor, supermarkets, discount, hunting supplies, bait & tackle, bicycle, boating/marine, & so on.

Places: Laundromats, gas stations, salvage yards, senior centers, churches, airports, libraries, car dealers, & so on.

Cemeteries - see the groundskeepers (lawn mowing in nicer weather, snowplowing in winter)

Local delivery trucks, courier companies like FED EX, UPS, and DHL, and trucking facilities (truckstops).

Hand out fliers at social events: rabies clinics, town meetings, dog or cat shows, church fairs, and football games.

Put fliers under the wiper blades of cars in parking lots: supermarkets, malls, flea markets, train & bus stations.

Drive around with signs and fliers taped to the outside of your vehicle to raise awareness about a lost dog.

Tape a sign on the left side of the rear window or trunk so drivers directly behind you can read it *easily*. Tape a *picture* flier near it. Park strategically in search or sighting areas, positioning your vehicle so the sign is visible.

Don't park illegally and aggravate everyone. A sign also helps residents know why you're in their neighborhood.

People tend to be more sympathetic, vigilant, and helpful if they constantly see someone searching for the dog.

If parked, prop a sign up on the dash or (weather permitting) put it outside under a wiper blade with some fliers.

It's relatively easy to find someone who thinks they saw the lost dog but DID NOT call to report it.

See "Sample Residential Flier" - A special flier, expanded in details and tailored for use in residential areas.

Lost dog searchers often ignore the time-consuming task of talking to *all* the residents in a search/sighting zone.

Residents are your source for new leads and valuable information about the general area. Some of them think lost dogs are easy to find and don't realize that every sighting call is important. If you haven't had any sightings, begin tracking the dog's direction of travel by going to the last known sighting spot, and then start knocking on doors.

Work safely, respect the property and privacy of others, and watch out for "Beware" or "No Trespassing" signs!

If no one's home, leave a flier at the entry door you think is *most used by the resident*, or choose a location where it will be noticed upon their return. Secure with scotch tape or place under a flowerpot so it doesn't blow away.

When going door to door with fliers, try working with someone so you stay safe, yet get the job done quickly.

Remember to tell everyone that fliers and signs will remain posted until the search is over.

Always replace worn or faded notices with new ones. Are several missing? Harsh weather can blow them away. A flier can “disappear” because someone wants to have a personal copy. It’s common to find signs (yard sale, lost pet, or others) removed from utility poles because they “tarnished” the look of a neighborhood or business entrance, or there’s an ordinance against posting. If only one notice keeps disappearing, try placing it further down the road.

Posts on the Internet reach out to individuals who care about animals.

When emailing fliers, ask the recipients to verify receipt and to print a hard copy to post in their office. Post on lost pet sites such as: www.Petfinder.com (in the “LOST” classifieds). Put the date your dog disappeared, and the town and street where it was lost. Include current sighting locations and a good description. Some ads are extremely vague and omit basic details, which doesn’t help people who try to match up lost and found pets. Write down passwords that you create when posting to websites so the ads can be changed or deleted in the future. Remember to renew or refresh all posts you made on Internet websites. Be courteous to others on lost pet sites by deleting posts when your dog is found - save the space and keep the spotlight on pets that are still missing. Don’t be afraid to talk with those who deal with animals on a daily basis and ask for *their* ideas or suggestions.

A picture can be worth a thousand words. Place an ad in newspapers using a nice, clear picture of your dog. Place ads in local “penny saver” publications - free newspapers picked up and read by thousands of people. Newspaper carriers *might* be willing to help by giving a flier to each of their customers.

It’s VERY important to provide a picture-flier with a detailed description of your dog to those who may eventually have it in their care, but not realize it. Animal shelters, vets, humane societies, and rescue groups deal with a *large* number of animals on a routine basis. Don’t let people guess if you found your dog or not. Continue to forward updated fliers to those involved with the care or rescue of animals. Start out from the spot where the dog disappeared and work outbound in a large radius (50 – 100 miles +), crossing state lines as needed.

Many dogs *do* survive the ordeal of being lost, regardless of breed, size, or age, and are found as “strays.” “Duncan” was lost, has been wandering for months, and is finally rescued by a nice lady who outsmarts him. He lost his collar with tags quite some time ago, never had a microchip implant (what the heck is that?) and was never tattooed (but that’s soooooo popular now!). Phone calls are made, emails exchanged, and Internet websites visited on Duncan’s behalf. Unfortunately, there’s no lost dog reports on file for him - anywhere. He’s handsome, knows basic commands and cute tricks, and is gentle and loving; but Duncan is a stray without “identification.” **Keep fliers working for you and your dog so they’re in the right place at the right time, even if you’re not.**

MINI-FLIERS

Make mini-fliers by downsizing yours to get several copies on one sheet of paper. The dog’s picture must remain clear and detailed, and the text readable by the *majority* of people who you give it to. Small fliers are easy to carry and fine to use as handouts when you forget ☹ to bring fliers, or you run out. They are convenient for people to put in a pocket, wallet, or purse. Mini-fliers can be created on blank postcards or standard-sized business cards, though you’ll probably have to edit the text. Make some at home or find a business professional for your printing needs.

Removing every flier, every sign, and all Internet posts, will let everyone know that your search is over.