



**NCIC**  
**National Crime**  
**Information Center**

# The Off-line Search

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**T**he National Crime Information Center (NCIC) is a nationwide computerized information system that includes millions of records for stolen property, wanted persons, missing persons, and unidentified persons records. Through the NCIC

System, local, state, and federal criminal justice agencies across the United States, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, and Canada have instant access to all available records. In addition, special provisions allow several other foreign nations limited access to records stored in the database.

On-line inquiries conducted by law enforcement personnel can quickly retrieve accurate information, thereby increasing the probability of criminal detection. However, an on-line inquiry alone may be inadequate in certain investigative situations. In such cases, agencies may have to request off-line searches of the NCIC database. This can be done by contacting the FBI's Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Division staff at (304) 625-3000 or via e-mail at IOAU@leo.gov.

An off-line search is a special technique that can be used to obtain information not available through an on-line inquiry. The results may provide relevant investigative information. For example, an off-line search of the NCIC transaction log can reveal if an inquiry was made on a particular individual or item of property. This could assist an investigator in locating an item of property, determine the proximity of an individual to a crime scene, substantiate or discredit an alibi, or trace the route of a person of interest. The CJIS Division personnel can search active and purged NCIC databases off-line using one or more of the information fields contained in the record to determine if a record for an individual or item of property is, or ever has been, entered. For example, nonunique personal descriptors, such as sex, height, weight, estimated age, and hair color can be used in searches for wanted, missing, or deceased person records. Through the use of "wildcard" characters, the CJIS Division staff can search fields when only partial information is available, such as license plate and vehicle identification numbers.

The following examples demonstrate instances where an off-line search—specifically tailored to the needs of the individual investigation—provided vital information that led to the case being solved.

#### **EXAMPLE #1**

Early on the morning of April 21, 1995, investigators with the Oklahoma City Bombing Task Force provided the CJIS Division staff with the name and birthdate of suspect Timothy McVeigh and requested them to return all available information as quickly as possible in connection with the investigation of the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City.

A transaction log search indicated that on April 19, 1995, approximately 90 minutes after the bombing, the Oklahoma State Highway Patrol had made an NCIC inquiry on Mr. McVeigh. With this information, investigators determined that the inquiry was the result of a traffic stop of Mr. McVeigh for speeding and operating a vehicle without a license plate. After the inquiry, Mr. McVeigh was jailed on a weapons charge and was in custody when the Task Force notified the Oklahoma State Highway Patrol of its interest. Mr. McVeigh was later arrested, charged, convicted, and executed in connection with the bombing.

#### **EXAMPLE #2**

In early 1999, a Field Investigations Office of the New York Division of Motor Vehicles (NYDMV) noticed a discrepancy in the vehicle identification number (VIN) of a 1961 Jaguar. The NYDMV then contacted the CJIS Division staff and requested an off-line search.

Based on a partial VIN obtained from further examination of the vehicle, a purged record search produced a 1981 stolen vehicle record for the same 1961 Jaguar. New York authorities recovered the automobile, valued at \$100,000.

#### **EXAMPLE #3**

After an informant gave an FBI Agent information about an organized drug group operating between Arizona and the Midwest, the CJIS Division staff conducted continuous transaction log off-line searches on names that the informant provided from January 1994 to February 1996. The staff found inquiries that verified the suspected geographic travel patterns of many of the subjects.

This information aided local and federal authorities in securing indictments of the individuals for conspiracy to distribute marijuana. Local and federal authorities subsequently searched the suspects' property and recovered cash and drugs valued at \$350,000. Nine individuals were arrested.

#### **EXAMPLE #4**

As part of an international racketeering investigation, an FBI Agent contacted the CJIS Division staff requesting lists of active and purged records of stolen Harley-Davidson motorcycles. Police in Denmark mounted a nationwide raid and used these listings to aid in the identification of stolen motorcycles. The raid resulted in the arrest of four individuals, all working for import companies, and the seizure of 192 Harley-Davidson motorcycles valued at \$5 million. Members of Denmark's Hell's Angels Motorcycle Club, as well as others, were subsequently charged with Knowingly Purchasing Stolen Goods.

#### **EXAMPLE #5**

The CJIS Division staff provided valuable lead information in an investigation of a missing female. The staff conducted a transaction log search on the missing person's

name and license plate for the 5 days before law enforcement officials had entered a record containing her personal data into the NCIC. The results included a query on the license plate from a neighboring police department while the vehicle was parked at a local motel.

Law enforcement personnel checked the motel and found that the vehicle was still there. The motel's desk clerk provided information that led the officers to a motel room where they found two men associated with the vehicle. They also found in the room a female who had been reported missing in a separate incident. The investigator's search of the vehicle's trunk revealed blood that was identified to be that of the owner who was then presumed to be a homicide victim. The police held the two men as murder suspects.

The two subjects eventually entered into a plea agreement. Each pled guilty to one count of First-Degree Murder and one count of Kidnapping. They were sentenced to life without the possibility of parole. Based on information provided by the murderers as a condition of the plea agreement, law enforcement officials subsequently recovered the body of the missing female.

#### **EXAMPLE #6**

In 1999, the Palm Beach County (Florida) Multi-Agency Auto Theft Task Force was formed to address the problem of organizations stealing and dismantling vehicles in Palm Beach County and adjacent areas. The Task Force's investigation revealed that more than 200 Chevrolet Corvettes had been stolen in Palm Beach County alone since 1994. As a result, the Task Force requested that the CJIS Division staff provide daily listings of records for Corvettes reported stolen to Palm Beach County agencies during a crucial 2-week period of the investigation.

The 6-month investigation came to a climax when search warrants were executed for two residences and a business where Chevrolet Corvettes were allegedly being received and dismantled. The recovered vehicles, accessories, and parts—all in the process of being shipped to locations as distant as South Africa—had an estimated value in excess of \$1 million. The 60 off-line searches that contained descriptive information of the vehicles assisted the Task Force in the identification of items recovered during the searches. The investigation eventually resulted in the arrest of three individuals who were charged with Grand Theft Auto, Operating a Chop Shop, and Dealing in Stolen Property.

#### **EXAMPLE #7**

Police were called to a private residence after the owner was found dead. Detectives subsequently determined that the individual was a homicide victim but found no evidence identifying the perpetrator.

After weeks of questioning family members and neighbors, the detectives began to suspect a stepson who lived several hundred miles away in a different state. Though the stepson claimed he was not in the area when the homicide occurred, a neighbor reported seeing a vehicle with out-of-

state license plates near the victim's home around the time of the incident.

Working with investigators from the Department of Motor Vehicles, the detectives were able to obtain a list of vehicles matching the description provided by the neighbor. Further investigation revealed that one license plate belonged to the girlfriend of the stepson. When confronted with the fact that her car may have been used in the commission of a crime, the girlfriend admitted the stepson had borrowed her car during the month the killing had occurred.

The detectives requested an off-line search of the transaction log to determine whether the vehicle had been queried within several days before or after the homicide.

The off-line search revealed that an agency in the county where the homicide occurred had made several inquiries. The detectives subsequently contacted the officer who requested the license check. His log indicated he had stopped the vehicle, questioned several occupants after seeing them drinking, and issued tickets. When this evidence was presented to the stepson, he confessed to the murder and also implicated the victim's son. This off-line search assisted in the arrest of two murderers.

#### **EXAMPLE #8**

An FBI field division contacted the staff of the CJIS Division to request an emergency off-line search of the transaction log. The case concerned a kidnapping with a ransom demand. The staff searched the transaction log for the victim's name and license plate number from the date of last contact to the current day. The results indicated that Texas authorities had queried the license plate several times.

The FBI Agent contacted the officer who had conducted one of the license plate inquiries. The officer advised him that the driver of the vehicle was suspected of robbing a convenience store and that officers had been following the vehicle throughout the day.

The driver was the lone occupant of the vehicle and his physical description was very similar to that of the alleged kidnapping victim. The Agent sent photographs and other pertinent information to Texas to assist the officers in the robbery investigation.

Following a second robbery, the suspect led law enforcement officers on a high-speed car chase that ended when the suspect's vehicle crashed. Officers could not use a photograph of the suspect taken at the time of the accident because facial injuries suffered by the suspect in the crash left him unrecognizable by witnesses. However, a photo provided by the FBI from the kidnapping investigation was then shown to the witnesses. They identified the suspect, and law enforcement officers issued a warrant and formally arrested the suspect on two counts of Robbery and one count of Extortion for the fabricated kidnapping.

#### **EXAMPLE #9**

On February 6, 2003, a woman reported her two brothers and their pickup truck missing from the Navajo Indian Reservation in Indian Wells, Arizona. On March 7, a man came across partial human remains about a mile from the victims' home. The FBI and Navajo Police conducted a joint crime scene investigation and found two shallow graves with the bodies of the missing men. Three days later, an FBI Agent with the Flagstaff Resident Agency (RA) of the Phoenix, Arizona, Field Office contacted the CJIS Division to request an off-line search to help find the vehicle.

The CJIS Division's staff conducted an off-line search of the January to March 2003 transaction log based on the vehicle's license plate and vehicle identification number. The search produced inquiries from the Tempe, Arizona, Police Department; the U.S. Border Patrol in Yuma, Arizona; and the Yuma County Sheriff's Department. The FBI Agent contacted the Tempe Police Department and learned that on January 24, the truck had been parked illegally and towed to an impound lot. The Agent then went to the towing company and found out who paid the fee to get the vehicle out of the impound lot. The Agent then contacted the U.S. Border Patrol in Yuma. Officers there told the Agent that on February 2, they had stopped the vehicle with three men inside. One of the men in the truck had an outstanding warrant in an unrelated case in Holbrook, Arizona, so Border Patrol officers turned the man over to the sheriff's department. The sheriff's department also impounded the truck.

On March 13, the FBI Agent located and questioned one of the three men from the truck. He told the agent that the two men in the truck told him they killed two people in Indian Wells and provided a suspect's name. When the FBI Agent interviewed the suspect on March 26, the man implicated the second suspect. The Agent then charged both individuals with First-Degree Murder of the two brothers. According to the RA, "the suspects would not have been identified, nor charged [without the off-line search]. The search saved hundreds of man hours of investigative time and truly resulted in the resolution of this case."

#### **CONCLUSION**

The NCIC off-line search is designed to provide law enforcement with investigative leads. Agencies that want an off-line search should contact the CJIS Division at (304) 625-3000, send an administrative message to The International Justice and Public Safety Information Sharing Network, also known as NLETS, with DCFBIWAQ9 as the destination Originating Agency Identifier, or send an e-mail to IOAU@leo.gov. Agencies are asked to complete a survey included with the results of each search in order to assist the FBI in evaluating the usefulness of the NCIC's off-line search program.

# NCIC/III OFF-LINE SEARCH REQUEST FORM

Date of Request \_\_\_\_\_ Name of Requester \_\_\_\_\_  
Agency's ORI \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone Number ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ Facsimile Number ( ) \_\_\_\_\_  
Agency's E-mail \_\_\_\_\_  
Type of Investigation \_\_\_\_\_ Case Number \_\_\_\_\_  
Type of Search Requested \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Time Frame for Search \_\_\_\_\_

## PERSON:

Name(s) and Date(s) of Birth \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Social Security Number(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
Other Identification Number(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
Race \_\_\_\_\_ Sex \_\_\_\_\_

## VEHICLE:

License Plate(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
License Plate State(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
Vehicle Identification Number(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
Make \_\_\_\_\_ Model \_\_\_\_\_  
Vehicle Year(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
Vehicle Color(s) \_\_\_\_\_

## ARTICLE/GUN:

Serial Number(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
Description \_\_\_\_\_

## BOAT:

Boat Hull Number(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
Description/Manufacturer(s) \_\_\_\_\_

**After completing this form, agencies should send it to the CJIS Division's Investigative and Operational Assistance Unit (IOAU) staff via facsimile at (304) 625-5393. For additional information about requesting an off-line search, agencies should contact the IOAU at (304) 625-3000; e-mail <ioau@leo.gov> or via the NLETS to ORI/DCFBIWAQ9.**