AMBER Alert

AMERICA'S MISSING: BROADCAST EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Law-Enforcement and **Broadcaster Guide**

www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org

NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN
www.missingkids.com

National Association of NAB BROADCASTERS
www.nab.org

Amber Rene Hagerman was a bright, blue-eyed third grader from Arlington, Texas, who was an honor-roll student, a girl scout, and a whiz on roller skates. She was also a fun-loving, 9-year-old who enjoyed playing with her little brother Ricky, watching her favorite television show "I Love Lucy," and eating lots of vanilla ice cream. But one Saturday afternoon in 1996, Amber's innocent life was taken away when a man grabbed Amber from her bicycle and drove off. Four days later she was found brutally murdered. Amber will always be remembered as the little girl from Texas who inspired her community to create a pioneering program to help rescue other abducted children.

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EMERGENCY
RESPONSE

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October 2001

Written by
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Many individuals contributed to and reviewed this handbook to help make sure every community has the proper information they need to create an effective AMBER Plan, especially the professionals listed below.

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Special thanks to Amber Hagerman's mother, Donna Norris, and her son Ricky.

This AMBER Alert – America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response - kit is dedicated to 9-year-old Amber Hagerman.

A Word From Edward O. Fritts, President & CEO of NAB

The National Association of Broadcasters is delighted to join the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children in presenting the *AMBER Alert – **A**merica's **M**issing: **B**roadcast **E**mergency **R**esponse* – handbook to local broadcasters and law-enforcement agencies.

Local broadcasters across the country are working in partnership with law-enforcement agencies in their communities to develop and implement local AMBER Plans. The goals are to help ensure that people in the area know as soon as possible that a local child has been abducted and provide them with the information they need to help return the child to safety. The AMBER Plan success stories detailed in this handbook speak for themselves about the power of expanded public awareness in saving children's lives.

Ever since the first commercial radio station went on the air early in the 20th century, America's broadcasters have been committed to serving the communities in which they operate. The National Association of Broadcasters applauds the many local broadcasters and law-enforcement agencies that are already working together to make their communities safer for children and their families. We hope that even more communities will benefit from these voluntary AMBER Plan partnerships in the years ahead.

By using the ideas and resources in this handbook, local broadcasters and law-enforcement agencies have everything they need to organize effective local AMBER Plans or strengthen plans that already exist. In the AMBER Plan, America's communities have a wonderful tool to help ensure that their most vulnerable residents are protected from harm.

The AMBER Plan is about helping people, and local broadcasters across the country are proud of their role in helping to make it work.

Edward O. Fritts, President & CEO,
National Association of Broadcasters

National Association of NAB BROADCASTERS®
www.nab.org

local broadcasters
Bringing Community Service Home

Foreword

In 1996, 9-year-old Amber Hagerman was kidnapped and brutally murdered in Arlington, Texas. At the time no one knew her legacy would live on in the hearts and minds of communities throughout the United States and beyond. Amber's tragic death had such a profound impact on her community and throughout northern Texas that it prompted regional law-enforcement agencies and broadcasters to develop an innovative emergency alert plan to help recover abducted children. They named it the AMBER Plan.

The plan calls for law-enforcement agencies to alert radio and television stations within minutes of a child abduction, in the same way stations are alerted during tornadoes, hurricanes, or other civil emergencies. The goal of the plan is to instantly galvanize the entire community to assist in the search for the child and suspect.

As the president and chief executive officer of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), I believe every community needs a swift and uniform response when a child is abducted. As we commemorate the five-year anniversary of Amber Hagerman's death, NCMEC is proud to launch the AMBER Plan nationwide along with the Dallas/Fort Worth Association of Radio Managers and the AMBER Plan Task Force. Our goal is to assist cities and towns everywhere with creating their own emergency alert plans.

The AMBER Plan already is credited with saving a number of children. Its success speaks volumes about the power of the plan and how it can be an effective investigative tool in every community. Even the United States (U.S.) Congress has endorsed the AMBER Plan. On October 25, 2000, the U.S. House of Representatives passed House Resolution 605 encouraging all communities in the United States to adopt an emergency alert plan for abducted children.

Statistics show that the first few hours of a child abduction are critical to the outcome of the case. According to a study by the U.S. Department of Justice, 74 percent of the children who were kidnapped and later found murdered were killed within the first 3 hours after being taken.[1] That statistic alone should prompt every community to implement the AMBER Plan before a tragedy strikes.

This *AMBER Alert – **A**merica's **M**issing: **B**roadcast **E**mergency **R**esponse* – handbook, along with the accompanying videotape, allows communities to take a proactive role in protecting the most vulnerable members of society – our children. A key component of the AMBER Plan is the Emergency Alert System (EAS), which provides the public with timely emergency information.

The AMBER Plan sends a strong message that crimes against children are intolerable and law enforcement, broadcasters, and individuals, working together, have the power to apprehend predators and bring abducted children home.

— Ernest E. Allen, President & CEO,
National Center for Missing & Exploited Children

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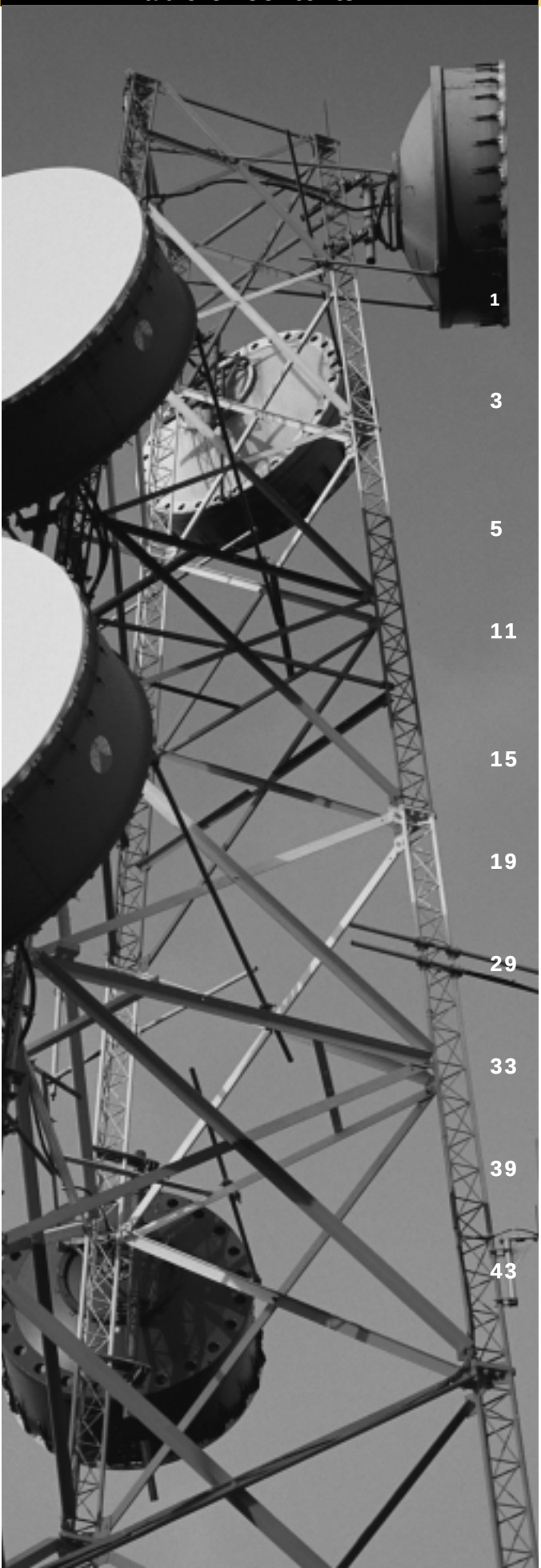
[1] Kenneth A. Hanfland, Robert D. Keppel, and Joseph G. Weis. *Case Management for Missing Children Homicide Investigation: Executive Summary.* Olympia, Washington: Office of the Attorney General, State of Washington and U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, May 1997, page 3.

Table of Contents



1 INTRODUCTION

3 ABOUT THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN

5 AMBER PLAN OVERVIEW

11 BACKGROUND: EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEM

15 HOW THE AMBER PLAN WORKS

19 CREATE YOUR OWN PLAN

29 LAW-ENFORCEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

33 BROADCASTER RESPONSIBILITIES

39 RESOURCES

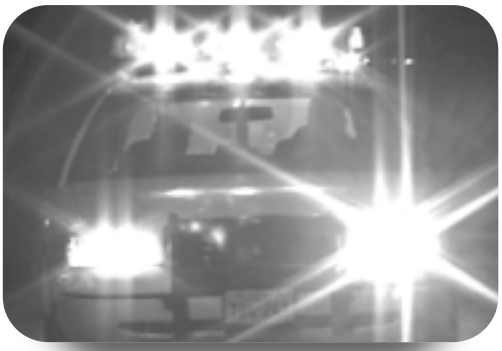
43 APPENDICES

Introduction

Speed is essential when trying to rescue an abducted child. That's why it is imperative that law enforcement and the media react quickly and get the word out to the community. The early hours of a child abduction are usually emotionally charged and chaotic, so it is vital to have a response system in place in advance of an incident.

The AMBER Plan is the answer because it activates an alert that can engage the entire community to look for both the child and suspect.

Experience has shown that a significant number of child abductions have been resolved because of extensive radio and television coverage at the local and national levels. The broadcast industry has a long history of commitment and service to our nation's communities. The AMBER Plan is one more way local broadcasters can help keep their communities informed and safer. It is also another powerful tool in law-enforcement investigations.



The original AMBER Plan was developed for a local community in northern Texas as a means of distributing urgent child abduction alerts to area radio stations through the Emergency Alert System. Because of its success, dozens of communities have used that plan as a model and developed their own plans that are unique to their local needs.

The *AMBER Alert – **A**merica's **M**issing: **B**roadcast **E**mergency **R**esponse* – handbook is a "how to" guide created to help law-enforcement agencies and broadcasters implement an emergency alert plan in their communities. It was developed to identify the steps involved in creating an efficient and effective AMBER Plan. This handbook encompasses not only the original AMBER Plan, but also unique components from other established plans around the country. Our goal is to provide every community with information on the necessary steps to develop comprehensive and consistent procedures that will help ensure an effective, rapid response to these cases.

It's important that those reading this handbook understand the AMBER Alert must be used appropriately and not overused. If the early warnings are not accurate and/or the case doesn't warrant an alert, then the integrity and credibility of the plan will be diminished if the plan is activated in those situations.

AMBER ALERT
America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response

About the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children

HISTORY

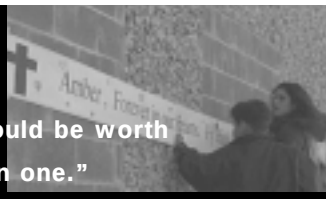
In the summer of 1981, John Walsh and his wife, Revé, lost their 6-year-old son, Adam, to a senseless abduction and murder. Along with several other families of missing and abducted children, the Walshes rallied for a national response to the problem. As a result of their efforts, the U.S. Congress passed the Missing Children Act in 1982. It mandated that information about missing persons, including children, be entered into the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) National Crime Information Center (NCIC). Even then, parents were amazed that there was no statewide or national effort to quickly notify law enforcement when a child was missing in a particular vicinity or region. The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children was established in 1984 to create a national network by which law enforcement and the public are quickly informed about cases involving missing children.

MISSION

NCMEC is a private, nonprofit organization that serves as a clearinghouse of information on child-victimization issues. Since opening its doors in 1984, NCMEC has come a long way from being known as the "milk-carton people." NCMEC created a toll-free, 24-hour Hotline, 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678), that receives an average of 600 calls per day. NCMEC launched an Internet CyberTipline (www.cybertipline.com) to receive leads online regarding child exploitation. And NCMEC expanded its services globally through the new International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children (ICMEC).

SUCCESS RATE

Today NCMEC's child recovery rate is 93 percent. This is due in large part to a strong commitment to working with victims' families and the law-enforcement officials charged with investigating disappearances. NCMEC does this by providing valuable resources that assist in resolving these cases more quickly. From creating a missing child's poster to featuring it on its award-winning web site, www.missingkids.com, NCMEC is constantly



"I think it's fantastic. If it saves one child, that would be worth the whole thing, and it's already saved more than one."

— Glenda Whitson, Amber's Grandmother,
Fort Worth *Star-Telegram*, 8/30/00

STATISTIC

Annually there are more than 114,000 attempted abductions of children by nonfamily members.[2]

working to use state-of-the-art technology in the search for missing children. One out of six children featured in NCMEC's "Picture Them Home" photo-distribution campaign is recovered as a direct result of someone recognizing the picture of that child and notifying authorities. This remarkable statistic has empowered NCMEC to embrace new ways to communicate more quickly with the widest possible audience when a child is missing or abducted.

PARTNERSHIP

NCMEC was established under the premise that everyone has a role to play in the search for missing children: law enforcement, the public, the private sector, and government. This is why the AMBER Plan makes such good sense. It joins law-enforcement agencies with broadcasters to fight serious child abductions. Since NCMEC was first established, it has worked with law enforcement on more than 77,000 cases of missing children and assisted in the location of more than 60,000 missing children. NCMEC credits law enforcement with the recovery of these children, but they cannot do it alone. They need the help of local broadcasters and the watchful eyes of entire communities to bring in the leads that can help solve a case.

"If only we had the AMBER Plan when our son, Adam, was abducted, it may have saved his life."

— John and Revé Walsh

[2] U.S. Department of Justice. *Fact Sheet on Missing Children: National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children* based on the research of David Finkelhor, Gerald Hotaling, and Andrea Sedlak. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, May 1990, page 1.

WHAT IS THE AMBER PLAN?

The AMBER Plan is a voluntary, cooperative program between law-enforcement agencies and local broadcasters to send an emergency alert to the public when a child has been abducted and it is believed that the child's life is in grave danger. Under the AMBER Plan, area radio and television stations interrupt programming to broadcast information about the missing child using the Emergency Alert System, formerly known as the Emergency Broadcast System. While EAS is typically used for alerting the public to severe weather emergencies, it is also the warning system for civil and national emergencies. The federal government requires all radio and television stations and most cable systems to install and maintain devices that can monitor EAS warnings and tests and relay them rapidly and reliably to their audiences. The idea behind the AMBER Plan is a simple one: if stations can broadcast weather warnings through EAS, why not child abductions? The AMBER Plan provides law-enforcement agencies with another tool to help recover abducted children and quickly apprehend the suspect.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the AMBER Plan is to provide a rapid response to the most serious child-abduction cases. When an alert is activated, law-enforcement agencies immediately gain the assistance of thousands of broadcast and cable listeners and viewers throughout the area. The plan relies on the community to safely recover the abducted child. It is hoped that this early warning system will not only coerce a kidnapper into releasing the child for fear of being arrested but also deter the person from committing the crime in the first place.

HISTORY

The AMBER Plan was created in 1996 as a powerful legacy to 9-year-old Amber Hagerman who was kidnapped and murdered in Arlington, Texas. Law enforcement says Amber was dragged from her bicycle while riding in a shopping center near her home. Her body was found four days later. The news of Amber's murder outraged the entire community and mobilized residents to take action. Following her murder, concerned individuals contacted local radio stations in the Dallas area and suggested that the station broadcast special "alerts" over the airwaves to help find abducted children. In response to this recommendation and the community's concern for the safety of local children, the Dallas/Fort Worth Association of Radio Managers, with the assistance of law-enforcement agencies in northern Texas, established the AMBER Plan. Initially it was only

radio stations that participated. In 1999, eight area television stations in the Dallas/Fort Worth area joined the plan and began sending out these urgent bulletins.

BENEFITS

- It's a powerful law-enforcement tool and wonderful way broadcasters can contribute to their communities by issuing the alerts.
- It's in the public's interest. It sends a strong message that law enforcement and broadcasters are providing a proactive way to help protect their community's children.
- It provides each agency with a rapid response to serious child abductions.
- Experience has shown that extensive radio and television coverage can dramatically increase law enforcement's ability to locate witnesses and help resolve these cases more quickly.
- Once the alert goes out, it engages the entire community to mobilize and assist with recovering the child and apprehending the abductor.
- The AMBER Plan not only recovers abducted children but acts as a deterrent to this type of crime.
- It helps build relations between law enforcement, broadcasters, and the community.
- It doesn't cost anything to implement.
- To date this innovative early warning system has been credited with saving the lives of 16 children.[3]

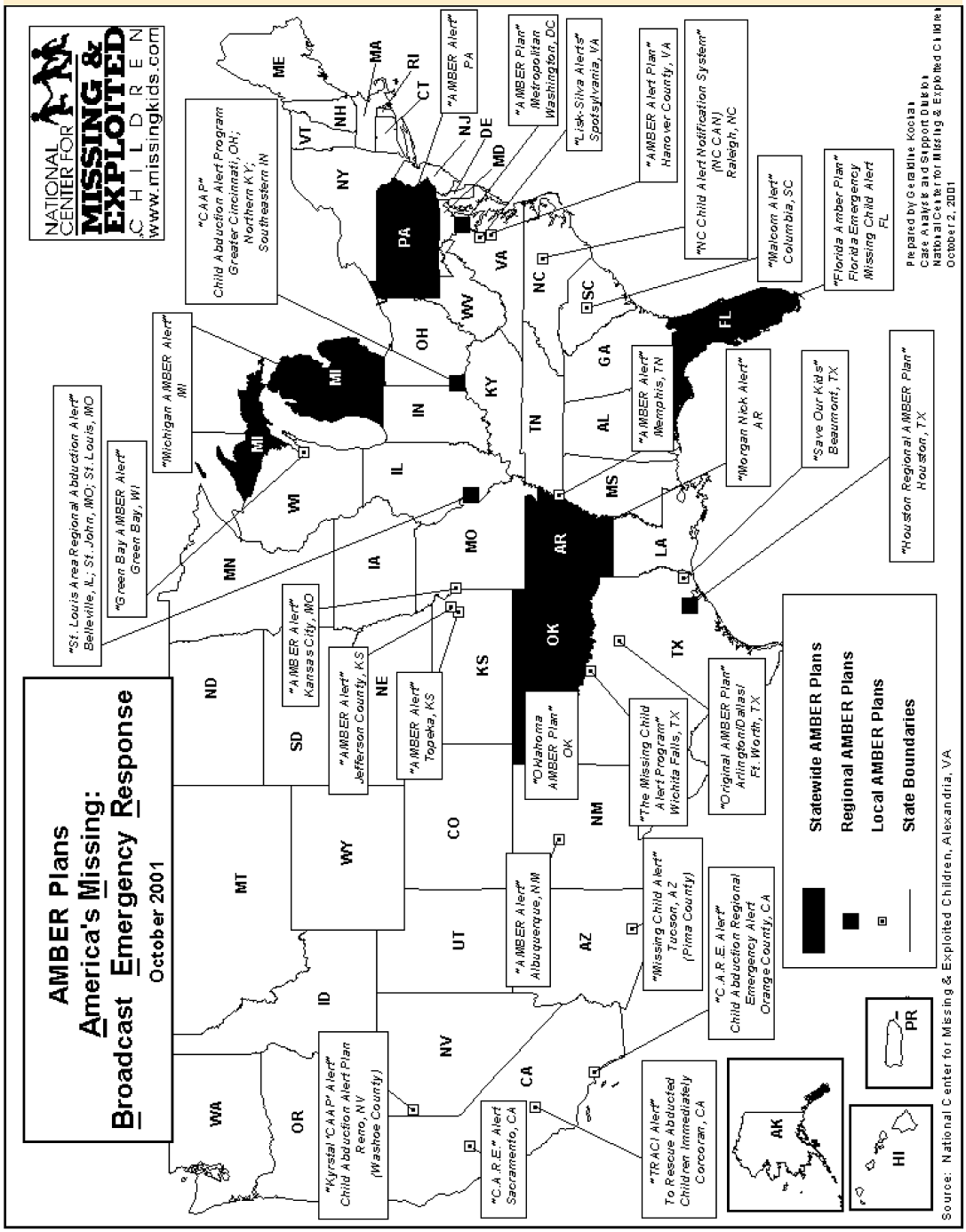
POPULARITY

The program's popularity is sweeping across the United States and into Canada. Since the original AMBER Plan was established, modified versions have been adopted at the local, regional, and statewide levels. Communities, regions, and states that have made the AMBER Plan their own include

Albuquerque, New Mexico
The State of Arkansas
Beaumont, Texas
Belleville, Illinois; Saint John, Missouri; and Saint Louis, Missouri
Greater Cincinnati, Northern Kentucky, and Southeastern Indiana
Columbia, South Carolina
Corcoran, California
Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas
The State of Florida
Green Bay, Wisconsin
Hanover County, Virginia
Houston, Texas
Jefferson County, Kansas
Kansas City, Missouri
The State of Pennsylvania
Memphis, Tennessee
The State of Michigan
The State of Oklahoma
Orange County, California
Raleigh, North Carolina
Reno, Nevada (Washoe County)
Sacramento, California
Spotsylvania, Virginia
Topeka, Kansas
Tucson, Arizona (Pima County)
Metropolitan Washington, DC
Wichita Falls, Texas

[3] Joann Donnellan. NCMEC Media Relations Manager, personal communication, September 29, 2001.

Currently there are 27 AMBER Plans throughout the U.S. including 5 statewide plans and 4 regional plans. Visit the NCMEC web site at www.missingkids.com to get the latest information on AMBER Plans nationwide.



The success stories below show the real power of the AMBER Plan.

SUCCESS STORIES

Saginaw, Texas

In March 1999, 9-year-old Fleisha Moore and a friend were walking home from school when a man driving a truck pulled into a parking lot just ahead of them. The driver got out and asked the girls whether they had seen a bunch of kittens in a nearby field. After Fleisha stepped forward to take a closer look, the man grabbed her, put her in the truck, and sped off. Luckily her friend was able to give police a full description of the abductor and details about the type of truck he was driving.

An AMBER Alert was immediately activated with a description of Fleisha, her abductor, and his red Chevy truck with tinted windows and a yellow air compressor in the truck bed. Radio stations across the region instantly filled the airwaves with urgent alerts about the crime.

About five hours after the abduction, three motorists called to report a child wandering alone along Interstate 45, about 60 miles from Dallas. It was Fleisha.

Within 10 minutes she was rescued.

Lieutenant Bill Walsh of the Dallas (Texas) Police Department is convinced that the AMBER Alert saved Fleisha's life. Fleisha told police she remembered that the man was listening to the radio when he pulled over and ordered her to get out. At the time an AMBER Alert about Fleisha's abduction was hitting the airwaves every 15 minutes over 32 radio stations in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. Thanks to the AMBER Plan, Fleisha is back home with her parents. Within hours after she was located, law enforcement arrested her abductor based on the detailed description given by Fleisha's friend.

STATISTIC

Annually as many as 300 children who are abducted by nonfamily members remain missing for long periods of time or are found murdered.[4]

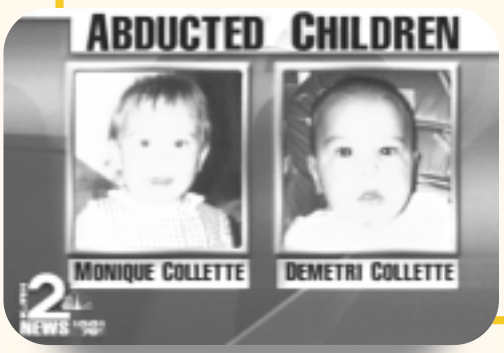
[4] U.S. Department of Justice. *Fact Sheet on Missing Children: National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children* based on the research of David Finkelhor, Gerald Hotaling, and Andrea Sedlak. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, May 1990, page 1.

Houston, Texas

Just hours after 5-year-old Maria Cuellar was lured into a stolen ambulance and kidnapped in April 2001, she was recovered unharmed thanks to the AMBER Plan. Authorities with the Houston Police Department say a man in his 20s had enticed five children between the ages of 4 and 8 from their apartment complex into an ambulance saying it was a playroom. But before the suspect drove off, all the children managed to escape except Maria. Not long after Maria was abducted an AMBER Alert was broadcast throughout the Houston region describing Maria, her abductor, and the ambulance. After the alert hit the airwaves, a man in the community came forward and told police that he had seen a child with a man matching broadcasters' description of the kidnapper in his neighborhood. After a rapid search of the area Maria was successfully recovered and reunited with her family. Her abductor was arrested. This all happened within a matter of three hours.

Tulsa, Oklahoma

Six-month-old Demetri Collette and his 19-month-old sister Monique were recovered unharmed after a September 1999 AMBER Alert caught the attention of a concerned motorist. Twelve hours earlier the family's bright pink Geo Tracker was carjacked from a Tulsa, Oklahoma, gas station with the children in the back seat. While their mother ran into the station's store, 19-year-old Bonnie Grubbs and her friend Joe Phelps took off with the car and children. Law enforcement quickly activated the AMBER Plan and alert bulletins flooded the airwaves. The children were recovered the next day when an attentive motorist, who heard the alerts, recognized the family's abandoned car on a dirt road about 75 miles northeast of Tulsa. Demetri and Monique were happily reunited with their mother. Grubbs and Phelps were later arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to 10 years in prison.



Background:
Emergency Alert System

The AMBER Plan uses the Emergency Alert System, formerly the Emergency Broadcast System, to deliver urgent child-abduction bulletins to area radio and television stations and cable systems. The AMBER Plan Task Force in Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas, chose this method of delivery because it is the oldest and most reliable means of relaying critical information to broadcasters quickly and simultaneously.

STATISTIC

Annually there are as many as 4,600 abductions by nonfamily members reported to law enforcement.[5]

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) says the EAS is used to transmit "life-saving messages" to the public. NCMEC believes a child abduction can be a life-and-death situation. If a community is slow to act, the child may not come home safely. If the child is never found or discovered murdered and the suspect is not apprehended, then the entire community remains at risk. The EAS provides a rapid response to child-abduction cases so the community can immediately react.

HISTORY

The Emergency Alert System was created in 1994 by the FCC. The new system replaced the Emergency Broadcast System established in 1951 as a way to provide the President with a means to address the people of the United States in the event of a national emergency. But, beginning in 1963, the President allowed state and local emergency information to be transmitted over the system as well. The FCC does not require stations and cable systems to broadcast state or local EAS Alerts. It is a voluntary service, but each station is required to broadcast national emergencies activated by the President.

REQUIREMENTS

The FCC requires all AM, FM, and television broadcast stations, as well as cable systems, to have an FCC-certified, fully operational EAS "encoder" for sending emergency information and a "decoder" for receiving emergency information. Other entities may voluntarily participate including satellite programmers and wireless telephone services. The FCC requires each broadcast station and cable system to monitor at least two independent EAS sources called primary EAS stations. Typically, if the first primary station is unable to broadcast the alert, the second station provides an automatic backup so an alert can be sent out to the community.

VOLUNTARY SYSTEM

Primary EAS stations volunteer to relay the emergency information to all broadcasters and cable operators in the area. Once these outlets volunteer to relay an EAS warning,

[5] U.S. Department of Justice. *Fact Sheet on Missing Children: National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children* based on the research of David Finkelhor, Gerald Hotaling, and Andrea Sedlak. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, May 1990, page 1.

they will transmit the audio and/or visual messages according to FCC rules.

ALERT ACTIVATION

The EAS is designed to warn the public about emergencies ranging from fires and tornadoes to evacuations and toxic chemical spills. Currently there is no specific event code for child-abduction cases within the EAS; therefore, broadcasters are classifying these alerts as a Civil Emergency Message (CEM) and programming their receivers accordingly. This is the same category used by city and county emergency management offices for hurricanes, floods, or other life-threatening emergencies. On March 20, 2001, the FCC included in its Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) a proposal to add a specific event code that could be used as an integral part of the AMBER Plan. In response to the NPRM, NCMEC filed comments requesting that the new code be designated an "Abducted Child Statement." The use of a specific event code, such as Abducted Child Statement, would more accurately reflect the code's intended purpose as compared to the currently used Civil Emergency Message. The AMBER Plan has the support of FCC Chairman Michael Powell, and NCMEC is hopeful that the Abducted Child Statement will be incorporated into the EAS. This will, however, not be certain until the Final Rule is released. Please refer to NCMEC's web site at www.missingkids.com for updated information.

FCC REVIEW

Any AMBER Plan must be presented to the Local Emergency Communications Committee (LECC) and become part of its written plan, as outlined in the FCC's EAS Rules. The State's Emergency Communications Committee (SECC) reviews and approves all LECC plans and signs off before the plans go to the FCC for approval. The SECC is usually made up of members of the state's association of broadcasters. Names and contact numbers for the committee in your state can be found at www.sbe.org/eas/eas_secc.html. You may also call 202-418-1228 for information.

As outlined above, once a revised LECC plan has been submitted to the state chair and approved, it will be forwarded to the FCC in Washington, DC, for review. Each plan submitted to the FCC must ensure compliance with EAS requirements and adhere to strict guidelines that have been developed to prevent overuse. Each state has the right to implement the EAS in the way it deems necessary. To learn more about the EAS, visit the FCC's EAS web page at www.fcc.gov/eb/eas or call the FCC's National Consumer Center at 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322).

WHO CAN TRIGGER THE EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEM?

Radio and Television Stations

Two local broadcast stations volunteer to be the primary EAS stations in every market. All of the broadcast stations and cable systems in an EAS local area monitor these two stations.

To determine which broadcast stations take on this responsibility in your area, contact the EAS chair of your state. Each state has a communications committee that will be able to help you. This contact information can be found at www.sbe.org/eas/eas_secc.html. Information is also available at the FCC-EAS web site at www.fcc.gov/eb/eas; by E-mail at eas@fcc.gov; and by telephone at 202-418-1220.

Emergency Management System

Each state has a Division of Emergency Management that can activate the alert program. While some divisions have the equipment to trigger the EAS, others may not, so you will need to find out how the division operates. A state's Emergency Management System can be a more effective way to distribute statewide or regional child-abduction bulletins because a network of local Emergency Alert Systems has been established across every state. But check with your local or state office to see if the division is operational 24 hours a day. For contact names and numbers, see the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) web site at www.fema.gov.

As an example the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) uses the state's Division of Emergency Management to activate the Florida Emergency Missing Child Alert Program (FEMCA). The division is part of the Governor's Office of Community Affairs. When a case meets the necessary criteria, the alert information is faxed from FDLE to the Division of Emergency Management's Operations Center, the state's warning point. The urgent message is then recorded and transmitted throughout the state's 12 EAS regions for distribution to local broadcasters. Or the alert is targeted regionally to areas where FDLE and the local law-enforcement agency feels it would be most effective.

State Law-Enforcement Agencies

State law-enforcement agencies can also be called upon to activate the EAS.

The Oklahoma AMBER Plan, a statewide program, is approved and activated by the Oklahoma Department of Public Safety (DPS). This agency activates the alert because the Highway Patrol Division of the department offered a 24-hour source through their dispatchers. No other state agency had this service. The Oklahoma Association of

Broadcasters provided the necessary equipment for the department and installed a telephone line to the Clear Channel News Network offices for dissemination over the statewide EAS system.

Another example is the Morgan Nick Plan which is activated by the Arkansas State Police (ASP) in an arrangement approved by the State Emergency Communications Committee. Once the plan was approved, the state police purchased and installed an EAS encoder/decoder box at Troop "A" Headquarters in Little Rock. It was determined that only one Troop headquarters in the state needed to activate the system for the information to go statewide. The EAS box cost the state police approximately $5,000. When a local investigating agency determines a Morgan Nick Alert is necessary, the information is E-mailed along with a photograph of the abducted child to Troop "A" Headquarters and a telecommunications operator transmits the abduction alert via the EAS to broadcast stations across the state.

BENEFITS OF THE EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEM

- **Immediate.** Every radio and television broadcast station and cable system will receive the information quickly and simultaneously.
- **Inexpensive.** There is no additional expense or reprogramming of the EAS receiver, unless the state police or another state agency is called upon to activate the system. In these cases the agencies will need to purchase the equipment if they don't already own it.
- **Automatic.** The new EAS utilizes digital equipment and digital signals that allow broadcasters and cable operators to interrupt programming for a warning either manually or automatically. Since some broadcast and cable entities are programmed from far away, automatic activation for local and national emergencies is a key part of EAS. This would benefit stations and cable systems that aren't staffed 24 hours a day because the system automatically overrides current programming and breaks in with the alert.
- **Accessible.** You don't need a television or radio to receive an emergency alert. The EAS messages can now be received and decoded through specially equipped consumer products such as pagers, cellular telephones, and other devices.
- **Less Intrusive.** EAS tests are shorter and less obtrusive to viewers and listeners; therefore, when people hear or see the EAS messages, they will take them more seriously.
- **Flexible.** EAS digital messages can be automatically converted into any foreign language normally used by the broadcast station or cable system.

"An abducted-child message is a superb use of EAS. It's a perfect example of how broadcasters can serve their communities."

— The Honorable Nick Lampson, (D-TX), 7/04/01

How the AMBER Plan Works

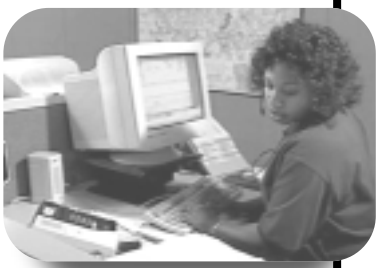
The story below is a real-life example of how the AMBER Plan works to help protect our children. The procedures used are specific to the original AMBER Plan developed for the Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas, metropolitan area. This case is the first successful recovery in the Dallas/Fort Worth area because of the AMBER Plan. Please review the AMBER Alert video for a dramatization of this success story.

1 Steve and Patricia Bradbury didn't think twice about letting their babysitter, Sandra Fallis, watch their daughter, Rae-Leigh. She had been a trusted babysitter in the past, but on the evening of November 19, 1999, that all changed. Fallis promised to have 2-month-old Rae-Leigh home by 6:30 P.M., but when 6:30 P.M. came and Fallis still wasn't there, Rae-Leigh's parents began to worry. A couple of hours later, Fallis was still nowhere to be found, so Steve called the police. This initiated a chain of events that led to an AMBER Alert.

2 Once the Arlington (Texas) Police Department received the report that Rae-Leigh was missing, they first had to determine if the case met the AMBER Plan's two main criteria for triggering an alert. They are **a)** the child should be 15 years of age or younger or have a proven mental or physical disability and **b)** law enforcement must believe the child is in danger of serious bodily harm or death.

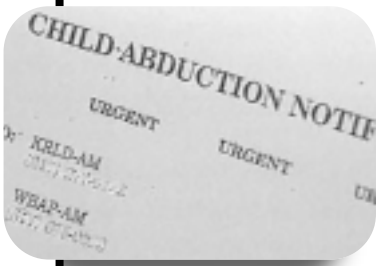
3 Rae-Leigh was just 8 weeks old at the time, but police weren't convinced that she was in danger. They decided to do a background check on the babysitter, Sandra Fallis, that lasted well into the night. After interviews with Sandra's family and friends, it was determined that the babysitter had a history of drug use and spent time in some of the local drug houses. She also had two convictions for driving while intoxicated. As a result police believed the child's life could indeed be in danger, and they prepared for an AMBER Alert.

Timeline continues on the next page



4 In the early morning hours of November 20, investigators consulted with Police Chief David Kinkle and agreed to implement the AMBER Plan. Before the alert information was sent to the broadcasters, the police department set up a crime-solver-style telephone hotline staffed by trained police personnel. Supervisors notified members of the department on duty that the alert was imminent.

5 Once the agency was ready to respond, Sergeant Mark Simpson put together the alert information for public distribution. This information was written on a standardized AMBER Alert form and included key details about the case such as a description of Sandra Fallis's Ford Ranger pickup and license-plate number. The information in the fax was filled out in clear, concise language, instead of police "shorthand." (*See* "Appendix 4 Child-Abduction Notification.")



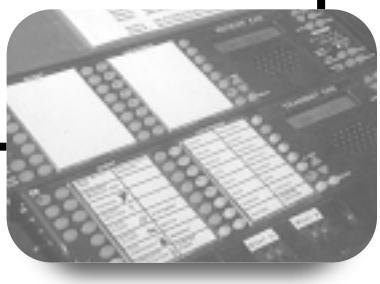
6 The investigating agency obtained a recent photograph of Rae-Leigh and disseminated it to area television stations for broadcast with the urgent message.

7 The Arlington Police Department faxed the standardized form via confidential fax numbers to the two radio stations – KRLD-AM and WBAP-AM – designated as primary stations under the Emergency Alert System.

Timeline continues on the next page

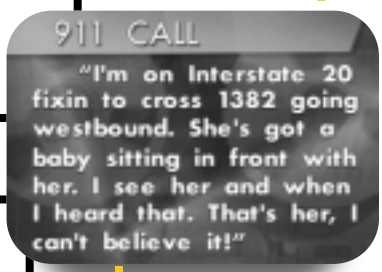
8 The primary EAS stations immediately called the Arlington Police Department to confirm the information. The two all-news radio stations also contacted each other to ensure they had both received the message.

9 The transaction between law enforcement and broadcasters took as little as 5 minutes, and the information was on the air within 30 minutes.



10 At 7:26 A.M. the primary stations sent out the urgent message "live" to area radio and television stations and cable systems via the Emergency Alert System. The message about Rae-Leigh's abduction was broadcast immediately by participating stations to millions of listeners in Texas.

11 Under the AMBER Plan the alert went out three to four times an hour for the first two to four hours.



12 Less than a half hour after the first AMBER Alert went on the air, a motorist called in on his cellular telephone to report that Fallis was driving right in front of him.

Timeline continues on the next page

13 Within minutes a patrol car cornered Fallis on Interstate 20, and she pulled over. When the truck was stopped, Rae-Leigh was found asleep in her child-safety seat. She was unharmed, but her clothes were badly soiled.

14 Rae-Leigh was safely returned to her parents, and Fallis was arrested and held in the Arlington, Texas, jail. A jury later found her guilty of kidnapping, and she was sentenced to 10 years' probation.

"We pray we will never have to use the AMBER Plan, but if we do, this system is certain to prove vital in protecting our children and keeping our communities safe."

— Governor Frank Keating,
The Oklahoman, 9/14/00

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children supports each community that initiates an emergency alert plan. Variations of the AMBER Plan currently exist across the country on a local, regional, and statewide basis. Each plan is unique, with communities, regions, and states developing their own criteria and individual ways of disseminating information about the abducted child. But no matter how a community decides to design its plan, the concept remains the same: to issue an immediate alert to the public via radio and television when a child-abduction case occurs. The 11 steps noted below provide an easy, streamlined approach to creating your own plan.

1 **Set Up a Task Force**

2 **Choose a Name**

3 **Choose a Plan**

4 **Set Up Criteria**

5 **Coordinate AMBER Plan Activation Process**

6 **Determine Alert Usage**

7 **Set Up a Review Board**

8 **Complete Law-Enforcement and Broadcaster Training**

9 **Test Alert Plan**

10 **Coordinate Press Announcement**

11 **Build Community Awareness**

1 SET UP A TASK FORCE

Since an emergency alert plan is a unique partnership between law enforcement and local broadcasters, it's vital to create a strong working team. When developing your plan, an AMBER Plan Task Force should be formed with representatives from your local, state, and federal law-enforcement agencies; Emergency Communication Committee; radio and television stations; cable outlets; and emergency management personnel.

It's important to emphasize that law-enforcement participation in the plan is free. Although many agencies agree to sign a Memorandum of Understanding to participate in the plan. (*See* a sample agreement in "Appendix 5.") Radio, television, and cable-system participation is voluntary and provided as a public service.

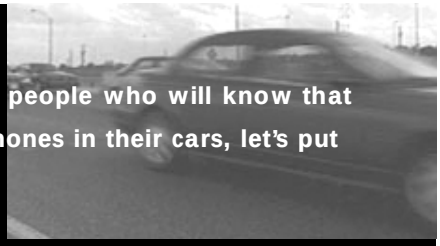
Cultivating good relations with local broadcasters and cable operators is crucial because the plan cannot work without their assistance. The general managers, operations

managers, program directors, and news directors of each radio and television station will be important contacts because they are the decision-makers for their organizations. They will decide whether programming will be interrupted for the alert. Another good source for support includes your state's association of broadcasters and the local Radio and Television News Directors Association. One way to start building the partnerships and working relationships you need to meet with your local/state Emergency Communications Committee chairperson or a representative of your local primary broadcast station. (*See* "Appendix 6 Sample Letter to Broadcasters.")

You may also want to get support from the mayor's office, state legislators, and/or congressional representatives. In addition activists in the community can play an important role both in designing and implementing your plan and creating public awareness about how it works.

Responsibilities of Task Force

- Oversees the plan's operation and effectiveness
- Develops criteria and procedures for the plan
- Ensures AMBER Alerts are distributed in a timely fashion
- Conducts regular/quarterly tests of the Emergency Alert System – AMBER Plan notification process
- Ensures law-enforcement agencies and broadcast representatives are well trained
- Creates a training videotape and brochure specific to your local plan that can be distributed to law enforcement, broadcasters, and the community
- Develops and implements a strategy for launching your AMBER Plan
- Cultivates good public relations for the plan
- Keeps a list of all participating agencies, broadcasters, cable operators, and community partners
- Meets regularly to review and evaluate the plan's procedures and revise it when appropriate
- Shares your plan with other adjacent law-enforcement agencies to collaborate on responses



"We'll have thousands and thousands of people who will know that a child is missing. Everybody's got cell phones in their cars, let's put them to good use."

— Sheriff Leon Lott, Richland County, SC,
AP Wire Service, 1/6/00

- Chronicles the successes and shortcomings of the plan and provides relevant data to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children so it can serve as a national clearinghouse of AMBER Plan information

2 CHOOSE A NAME

Consider combining the name of your city, region, or state with the AMBER Plan name. For example Kansas City (Missouri) AMBER Alert or Oklahoma AMBER Plan. You may also include NCMEC's acronym, **A**merica's **M**issing: **B**roadcast **E**mergency **R**esponse.

Your plan also can be named after a local kidnapped child, with permission from that child's family, so that your community may better identify with the plan. The Arkansas Morgan Nick Plan was named after an 8-year-old girl who was kidnapped in June 1995. In Columbia, South Carolina, the emergency alert plan is called the Malcom Alert in memory of 8-year-old Malcom Bond who was kidnapped and murdered in May 1999.

You can also give your plan a more general name such as the C.A.R.E. Alert–Child Abduction Regional Emergency. This name is used in certain areas of California.

3 CHOOSE A PLAN

Work with your task force to decide whether a local, regional, or statewide plan would be most effective. Although the AMBER Plan was created as a local plan for the northern Texas area, the plan's success has influenced other areas of the United States to develop their own individual plans. The type of plan you choose should be based on your area's geography, population, and specific community needs, as well as the broadcast reach of the radio stations, television stations, and cable systems participating in your plan. (*See* "Appendix 1 Types of AMBER Plans.")

4 SET UP CRITERIA

NCMEC recommends each agency consider the **three important criteria** noted below when developing your plan.

- Law enforcement confirms a child has been abducted
- Law enforcement believes the circumstances surrounding the abduction indicate that the child is in serious danger of bodily harm or death
- There must be enough descriptive information about the child, abductor, and suspect's vehicle to believe an immediate broadcast alert will help

Background

The original criteria for activating the AMBER Plan in Texas defined "abduction" as an incident involving a child younger than 18 unwillingly removed from his or her environment without permission from the child's legal guardian or representative. It was also believed the AMBER Plan would only be used for abductions involving "strangers."

In 1999 the Dallas/Fort Worth Association of Radio Managers and AMBER Plan Task Force decided to change the criteria because they became concerned about the large number of alerts that were being activated. The new criteria lowered the age of the child to 15. Officials also added language to clarify that an AMBER Alert could be triggered if the child was older than 15 with a proven mental or physical disability. And the word "stranger" was eliminated for an important reason: it is not just strangers who can endanger the life of a child, but parents and family acquaintances as well. Still, agencies are advised to err on the side of caution in these circumstances to prevent false alarms from occurring.

Warning

The idea is to keep the criteria simple. (*See* "Appendix 2 Setting Up Criteria.") It's also important to understand that if a case doesn't qualify, an alert should not be activated. A plan that continues to be activated in an environment of being "better safe than sorry" can erode public and law-enforcement confidence in the system. And you may create a "cry wolf" effect if the system is activated too many times.

STATISTIC

Annually there are more than 450,000 children who run away.[6]

"The AMBER Alert is a new idea born of desperation. It is a brilliant idea."

— Marc Klaas, father of Polly Klaas (Kidnap/Murder Victim), The Associated Press State & Local Wire, 12/19/99

Although each case has its own set of circumstances, law enforcement must follow the abduction criteria as closely as possible. It's important for law-enforcement agencies to clearly understand the criteria and not feel pressured from the community to trigger an alert.

[6] U.S. Department of Justice. *Fact Sheet on Missing Children: National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children* based on the research of David Finkelhor, Gerald Hotaling, and Andrea Sedlak. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, May 1990, page 2.

5 COORDINATE AMBER PLAN ACTIVATION PROCESS

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children and AMBER Plan Task Force recommend using the Emergency Alert System when activating the AMBER Plan. The system has proven to be the most efficient and expedient way to disseminate information to area broadcasters and cable operators simultaneously. Other methods of first-time notification such as fax machines, E-mail, voice mailboxes, media wires, and media-specific pagers do not offer simultaneous delivery to participating radio and television stations. There are some communities, however, that use alternate and/or supplemental means of activating their emergency alert plans in addition to the EAS. (*See* "Appendix 3 Supplemental Methods of Distributing AMBER Alert Information.")

6 DETERMINE ALERT USAGE

Every community creating an AMBER Plan must decide how frequently the AMBER Alerts will be broadcast by area stations. In making that decision, it's important to remember that the plan was designed to be used sparingly. Overuse of the alerts will only make the community numb to the purpose of the plan. After the first EAS usage, it's up to each broadcaster to put out the alert on its own. The Dallas/Fort Worth AMBER Plan has been in effect since late 1996 and has had less than one activation a month.

It is a big commitment for broadcasters and cable operators to be a part of this plan. They must be prepared to shift an advertising spot or break into programming. Broadcasters are encouraged to broadcast the alert as soon as possible in order to help save a child's life.

While the original AMBER Plan recommends stations rebroadcast the alert every 15 minutes for the first 2 hours, other plans set different times.

- The Houston Regional AMBER Plan requests broadcasters to repeat the alert at least once every half hour for two hours.
- The DC AMBER Plan asks broadcasters to air the alert three times an hour for the first two hours.
- The Florida AMBER Plan has no set times for broadcasting child-abduction alerts but encourages stations to air the urgent bulletins as often as seems practical.

AMBER Alert Updates

An AMBER Alert Update is only issued via the EAS when significant new information is received regarding the child or suspect. This would include a recent sighting of the suspect's vehicle or a recently developed witness to the crime. Otherwise additional updates from the investigating department should be provided to broadcasters at the agency's discretion. Some cases may be resolved quickly, within hours of the first alert, while others may remain unsolved for days or even weeks. In extended situations, each station must decide how often it will continue to broadcast the information. At some point a decision may be made to discontinue the alert information unless new information is provided.

AMBER Alert Cancellation

An AMBER Alert Cancellation is only activated when a child-abduction case is resolved within the first 24 hours. In this case, a final bulletin should go out to the EAS broadcast stations so that it can be issued, notifying the public to stop looking for the child and/or suspect. A cancellation alert does not prevent broadcasters from airing additional follow-up reports on the case. It just means they no longer need to interrupt programming for the alert. If the child is found 24 hours or more after the abduction, the information will be broadcast during a regular newscast.

7 SET UP A REVIEW BOARD

A law-enforcement review board should be created with a cross-section of participating agencies in the area. This committee of officials should meet regularly to oversee the community's plan, review all activations to help ensure accuracy, and clarify any procedural issues. Within a specified amount of time, the investigating agency that activates the alert should submit a follow-up report to the review board. If a law-enforcement agency continues to disregard the criteria created for the plan, the review board has the authority to instruct broadcasters not to honor an investigating agency's activation request.

8 COMPLETE LAW-ENFORCEMENT AND BROADCASTER TRAINING

For an AMBER Plan to be effective, it is essential that local broadcasters and law-enforcement agencies are aware of the program and how it works. Everyone needs to be informed about the plan and trained in the procedures before an announcement to the public takes place. To facilitate this training, NCMEC has included a videotape that can be viewed during law-enforcement roll call as well as newsroom meetings. It gives a general overview of how the AMBER Plan works and why it was developed.

If possible it is recommended that each community produce its own videotape to include the local criteria and procedures necessary to activate an alert. Many areas with established plans have turned to local television stations to produce this tape. Copies of the tape should then be distributed to all participating law-enforcement agencies and radio and television stations.

9 TEST ALERT PLAN

Law-enforcement agencies should distribute a "test fax" to the designated radio and television stations to confirm the system is in place. Make sure you clearly state on the standardized form that your department is conducting an "AMBER Alert test," or a "Child Abduction Alert test." For example, "THIS IS ONLY A TEST! NOT FOR BROADCAST!" In addition you should request that the designated radio and television stations conduct a callback to the investigating agency.

STATISTIC

Annually there are more than 350,000 children abducted by family members.[7]

Alert tests should be conducted quarterly. This will help assure that the plan is working effectively and information is distributed in a timely fashion. The investigating agency should contact the primary stations and schedule a test transmission when convenient.

10 COORDINATE PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT

When the system has been thoroughly tested and everyone understands the plan and how it works, then an official announcement should be made. A news conference should not be held before all broadcast representatives and law-enforcement agencies have been well-trained in the plan's procedures. Nor should public-service announcements (PSAs) about the plan be aired until it is operational. You must be ready to implement the plan immediately when a case occurs. The time to start training is not the day a child is abducted and an alert is requested.

11 BUILD COMMUNITY AWARENESS

Education

Law-enforcement agencies and broadcasters need to educate their communities about what to do if they witness a child abduction or believe a child is missing. People should be told to immediately call 911 and ask for their local law-enforcement agency. The caller should provide law enforcement with as many details as possible about the abduction including detailed descriptions of the child, suspect, and suspect's vehicle. Key community leaders on your task force can act as important liaisons to the public

[7] U.S. Department of Justice. *Fact Sheet on Missing Children: National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children* based on the research of David Finkelhor, Gerald Hotaling, and Andrea Sedlak. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, May 1990, page 1.

when it comes to raising awareness. They can do this by giving presentations to area civic organizations, schools, and safety fairs. You can also call on community leaders to distribute brochures about how the AMBER Plan works. It's essential that individuals understand how they play a role in this innovative emergency alert plan.

Sponsorship

The AMBER Plan Task Force in Texas has been inundated with companies wanting to attach themselves to the program. Texas is committed to not commercializing the plan, but sponsors can be helpful in creating or underwriting brochures or videotapes for community awareness. To maintain the credibility of the plan, names of sponsors and supporters should never be included in the broadcast alerts.

AMBER Plan Partners

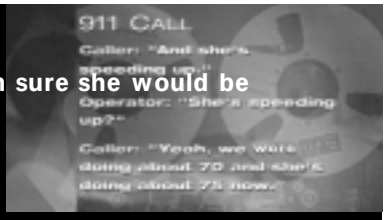
Each community may want to encourage local businesses to become partners with your AMBER Plan. The Houston Regional AMBER Plan includes a Partner Program that involves municipal and school-bus programs, taxi companies, courier and delivery services, repair services, and other companies and agencies that have a large number of drivers on the road who can help search for the child.

When an alert is activated, these partners will receive the information immediately through E-mail or fax. At that point they are encouraged to notify their employees, customers, and vendors by E-mail or fax of each AMBER Alert, urging them to be on the lookout for the abducted child, suspect, and/or suspect's vehicle.

These partners may also offer financial or promotional support; donate in-kind services; and offer access to manpower, equipment, and other resources to the plan's organizers.

"If we had this when Morgan was taken, I'm sure she would be back by now. She'd be home."

— Colleen Nick, Mother of Morgan Nick (Kidnap Victim), *The Dallas Morning News*, 1999



Marketing

As you create your AMBER Plan, keep in mind the various groups that are essential to its success. The groups noted below are key players in the development, implementation, and maintenance of the AMBER Plan.

- Law enforcement
- Radio, television, cable systems, and newspapers
- Local/state/nationally elected officials
- Associations
- Civic service groups
- Individuals

It is important to create strong communication links with all parties to have full cooperation for your plan. While the AMBER Plan is primarily a function of law enforcement and broadcasters, its success depends on the response from individuals in your community; therefore, it is imperative to recognize, acknowledge, and reinforce the role of individuals in the success of the AMBER Plan. When an AMBER Alert is activated, individuals need to listen, locate the child, and immediately call law enforcement. Individuals in your community need to be the eyes and ears for law enforcement, led by instructions from broadcasters. It is also important to remember the AMBER Plan's potential role as a deterrent to abductors. In order to be an effective deterrent, the program must have a high profile in the community.

Ideas to enhance the visibility of your AMBER Plan

- Develop an AMBER Plan brochure for your community
- Establish standard talking points for officers, broadcasters, and community liaisons who will speak about the plan

- Host informational booths at local safety and community fairs to hand out information
- Distribute promotional items to the public to remind them about your local plan
- Encourage news segments on past AMBER Alert activations and success stories, or encourage broadcasters to report more generally on how it works
- Create posters for newsrooms and law-enforcement agencies that describe the plan's criteria and its procedures
- Create pocket-size activation cards for law enforcement to carry while on duty
- Write an editorial in your local newspapers to explain the importance of the AMBER Plan to your community
- Create radio and television public-service announcements to educate people about your plan
- Create a public web site posting information about your AMBER Alerts, your local plan, and how it works with links to law-enforcement agencies, broadcast, and NCMEC web sites

1 Develop child-abduction protocol

2 Develop a major case-response plan

3 Develop contact lists and confidential broadcast fax numbers

4 Establish telephone banks

5 Notify law-enforcement personnel

6 Contact NCMEC

7 Prepare for media reaction

8 Prepare for community reaction

9 Review alerts

1 DEVELOP CHILD-ABDUCTION PROTOCOL

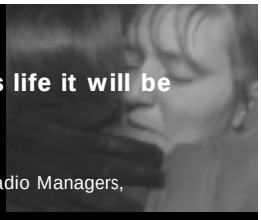
The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children feels strongly that every law-enforcement agency should have an established protocol for investigating missing/abducted-child cases. Only by developing effective and efficient policies and procedures can agencies help ensure the successful resolution of these cases.

If your agency does not have an established protocol, you may wish to contact NCMEC to receive a copy of NCMEC's publication titled *Missing and Abducted Children: A Law-Enforcement Guide to Case Investigation and Program Management*. This publication contains chapters covering each type of missing-child case and provides individual checklists that offer step-by-step recommendations for successful case investigation. A free copy of this publication can be obtained by calling 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678) or visiting www.missingkids.com. NCMEC also provides training in all aspects of missing- and exploited-child cases. NCMEC's investigators' course is conducted at regional sites and the Jimmy Ryce Law Enforcement Training Center in Alexandria, Virginia. These courses range from regional, investigative training sessions to policy-development seminars.

Once a child-abduction protocol plan is established, each agency should incorporate the guidelines of its local AMBER Plan including a standardized AMBER Alert fax form which will be used when an abduction is confirmed. This fax form will be filled out by the agency investigating the case and sent to the primary radio and television stations in your area that are responsible for triggering the EAS. Having the fax form in place will make it easier for your agency to prepare important information about the case.

"If an AMBER Alert can save just one child's life it will be more than worth it."

— J.D. Freeman, Former Board of Directors of the Association of Radio Managers, *Reader's Digest*, 11/00



2 DEVELOP A MAJOR CASE-RESPONSE PLAN

It is important that every department recognize the need to plan the response to activating the AMBER Alert. The plan should coordinate a 24-hour response of personnel to accommodate the crisis and a built-in review system for scaling back the initial response. The investigating agency must

- Decide who in the department can authorize an AMBER Alert. The names of these individuals should be known throughout the agency and clearly posted with contact information.
- Obtain the information noted below before an AMBER Alert can be announced. This information will be included in the standardized fax form distributed to the primary radio and television stations.

- Name, age, and physical description of the child
- Description of the child's clothing
- Location and time that the child was last seen
- Description of the vehicle involved in the abduction
- Description of possible suspects
- Last known direction of travel and possible destination
- The investigating law-enforcement agency and telephone number the public should call if they have information about the case
- Name and telephone number of the contact person for the media
- A recent photograph of the abducted child from the family

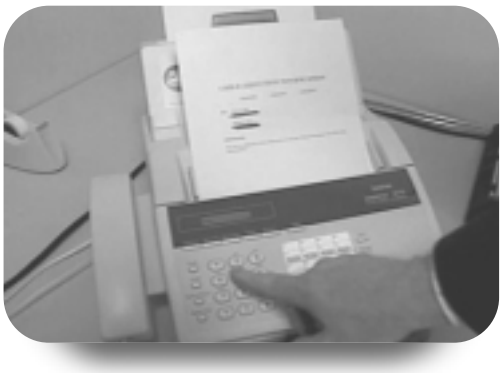
- Once the victim and suspect information has been confirmed, it must be passed on to the appropriate officer in charge so an AMBER Alert fax form can be sent to the EAS broadcast stations. Activation of the AMBER Plan will only be authorized by the law-enforcement agency that reports the abduction. Broadcasters play no role in activating the plan.

- As soon as possible, the investigating agency should obtain the most recent photograph of the abducted child. The photograph should then be scanned and E-mailed to broadcasters. For agencies that don't have E-mail capability and Internet access, the photograph will need to be taken to a central location such as a command center to allow the television cameras to capture the photograph on tape for broadcast purposes.

- Consideration must be made for allocating additional resources. Officers may need to be reassigned from other units. Assistance may be necessary from other municipal, county, and state agencies. And the FBI should also be contacted.
- Designate a media liaison to coordinate information and interviews. This person would also deal with individuals who have no investigative input. Be prepared for the possibility of two media briefings a day (morning and afternoon) depending on the case.

3 DEVELOP CONTACT LISTS AND CONFIDENTIAL BROADCAST FAX NUMBERS

Every community needs to develop a list of all law-enforcement agencies and broadcast stations (with fax numbers and E-mail addresses) that are participating in the AMBER Plan. Most importantly, the list should include the law-enforcement officers who are authorized to trigger the alert and the primary EAS stations in the plan's area. Telephone numbers, fax numbers, and E-mail addresses should be compiled and updated so that alert information can be disseminated quickly when an abduction occurs. An agency may even want to pre-program the fax numbers for the primary broadcast stations into its machines for a more rapid response.



4 ESTABLISH TELEPHONE BANKS

Prior to activating the AMBER Plan, it is critical that the "hotline" telephone banks be set up and staffed. Agencies must be positioned to receive and process incoming leads from individuals. Volunteers or personnel must be in place to take calls for at least 24 hours once the plan is activated, or until the alert is cancelled.

Law-enforcement agencies must have an assigned telephone number that will be given out to the public during the alert message. This number must be able to rollover into several other separate lines to handle the large volume of leads that may come in after the AMBER Alert activation.

5 NOTIFY LAW-ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL

Someone in a supervisory role should notify the entire agency about the AMBER Alert and furnish all personnel with details about the case. Notify other agencies about the alert via administrative message/teletype.

STATISTIC

Annually there are as many as 438,200 children who are lost, injured, or otherwise missing.[8]

[8] U.S. Department of Justice. *Fact Sheet on Missing Children: National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children* based on the research of David Finkelhor, Gerald Hotaling, and Andrea Sedlak. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, May 1990, page 2.

6 CONTACT NCMEC

Please make sure to contact the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children to report the child-abduction case. This can be done through the 24-hour Hotline at 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678).

7 PREPARE FOR MEDIA REACTION

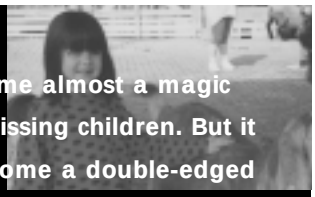
Once the alert is activated, media coverage will be overwhelming, especially for a small department. A public information officer (PIO) should be appointed to handle the press. This will free up the sheriff or police chief who is trying to investigate the case. The PIO should keep the media informed about the case with daily updates and media releases. PIO's should utilize the media as much as possible so they receive the maximum exposure for their case.

8 PREPARE FOR COMMUNITY REACTION

Don't underestimate the power of the plan. The reaction from the community will be intense and overwhelming because most everyone wants to help. The hardest part for law enforcement will be to stand up to a parent in the community and say that a particular incident doesn't fit the criteria of the plan, so an alert cannot be activated. If the plan is triggered too often, then everyone will lose faith in the system, and people will not react to the situation.

9 REVIEW ALERTS

After an alert is triggered, each agency should be prepared to file a report to the Review Committee. The report should include the reasons why the AMBER Plan was used. After the alerts are reviewed, a written report should be sent to all participating members of the plan for their evaluation and recommendations.



"It has become almost a magic potion for missing children. But it can also become a double-edged sword. And I tell any department attempting it, 'you'd better be ready to make some hard and fast decisions that are going to affect you for a long, long, time with every case.'"

—Dee Anderson, Cofounder AMBER Plan, *The Kansas City Star*, 10/18/99

Arlington, Texas, discovered this the hard way. In the beginning, law enforcement was criticized for not activating the alert often enough. Then they changed their ways and activated the alert in an environment of being "rather safe than sorry." As a result they had six activations in five weeks and none met the criteria they felt were appropriate. Fearing the plan's credibility would suffer if it continued to operate under the same guidelines, the Association of Radio Managers (ARMS) in Dallas/Fort Worth, established stricter criteria for activating the alert. ARMS also created a review committee to evaluate the circumstances surrounding each AMBER Plan activation. Moreover ARMS announced that if a police department continually disregarded the criteria, they would instruct broadcasters not to honor that agency's activation requests.

In any news organization a report of a child abduction is considered a breaking story. Before an AMBER Alert is activated each station must have a coordinated plan that brings together the engineering, production, talent, and news-gathering departments of the station. While the broadcast community does not participate in the decision-making process that triggers an AMBER Alert, radio and television stations, together with cable systems, are critical to the program's success.

1. **Establish AMBER Plan response protocol**
2. **Set up confidential fax lines**
3. **Prepare for community response**
4. **Promote staff understanding of the emergency alert system**

1 ESTABLISH AMBER PLAN RESPONSE PROTOCOL

When a station commits to an emergency alert plan it needs to develop a protocol for responding to the alert. Time is critical when a child is abducted because the more quickly the information is broadcast to the community, the more quickly the case could be resolved. Once stations agree to be a part of the plan they must broadcast the information sent to them by the investigating agency.

- Before an AMBER Alert is distributed to participating radio and television stations via the Emergency Alert System, each station needs to coordinate how the information will be handled and by whom. It's a good idea to determine the chain of command that will determine how the system will work so that an alert can be broadcast as quickly as possible.

- Every television station must decide who will transcribe the information that is being transmitted via the EAS. Someone should be designated to obtain the information and create a "crawl" format for television.

- For example, in Kansas City, Missouri, WDAF-TV created a system so the EAS Alert is recorded at the assignment desk and then transcribed. The information is then typed into the station's character generator, which produces a "crawl" of the message at the

"It was a huge success for everybody involved; a partnership between law enforcement and the media. It's nice to see everything come together like that."

— Mike Murray, MO police spokesman,
The Associated Press State & Local Wire, 3/10/00

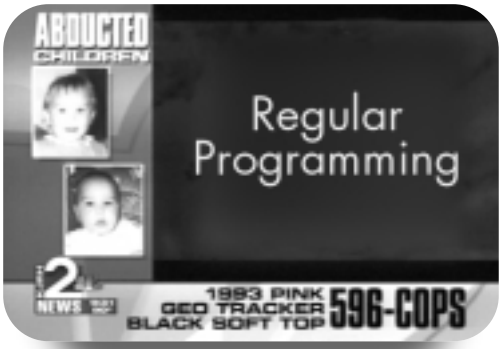
bottom of the television screen. The information is also distributed throughout the newsroom so that it can be used on upcoming newscasts or cut-ins.

- Once the primary stations receive the child-abduction information, they will either read the copy as it's written or rewrite it in broadcast style including all the information provided by law enforcement. Then the primary stations will broadcast the alert "live" through the EAS and transmit the information to area broadcast stations and cable systems. Currently many areas are using the EAS for abducted children under the **Civil Emergency Message** category that all stations are programmed to receive. (For category updates visit www.missingkids.com.) The bulletins then go out simultaneously to all participating radio and television stations and cable systems regardless of the format or time of day. Each station and cable system monitors at least one of the EAS stations on their receivers.

- The primary radio and television stations will then activate the EAS by sending out three digital data bursts. Next the stations will transmit the AMBER Tone, a special alert tone that will immediately precede the message. This tone has a distinct sound to distinguish the AMBER Alert from other alerts such as weather emergency alerts. After the tone, the text message of the alert from the investigating agency will be read. When the bulletin is sent out there will be no reference to the call letters of the particular station that is transmitting the alert, nor will it end with a reporter sign off. The EAS stations will broadcast just the information that was faxed to them from law enforcement. Following the tone the broadcaster describes the abducted child, the suspect, any available information on a vehicle that may have been used in the abduction, and any other details provided by law enforcement.

- Following transmission of the message, three digital data bursts should be sent again to terminate the message. Then the audio message from the EAS stations will simultaneously reach each EAS receiver at participating radio and television stations and cable systems in the area. Procedures for interrupting programming will vary according to station policy.

- Each station must decide if it will take the original alert, interrupt programming, and broadcast the message. If this is done, the station must program their EAS to automatically interrupt programming. The station can also choose to transcribe the alert and rebroadcast the message using its own anchor or reporter. If a station decides to transcribe the alert, a system needs to be established within each news division to handle this task as the EAS message comes over the system only once and is not usually recorded.



If television stations are in the middle of a newscast, the anchor can immediately break-in with the AMBER Alert information. If the alert comes into the station during regular programming, the station can create a "crawl" that would run at the bottom third of the television screen with vital information about the abducted child or suspect. If the child's photograph is available it can be broadcast along with the "crawl."

- The alert will be repeated as part of regular programming three to four times for the first two hours that the child is missing. If a station is not staffed 24 hours a day, then station managers should develop a protocol to assure the consistency of the program.

2 SET UP CONFIDENTIAL FAX LINES

Primary EAS stations may want to install confidential fax lines to help eliminate the potential problem of false or misleading information being distributed. Only authorized law-enforcement personnel will maintain the confidential fax number.

The confidential fax numbers should be given to the law-enforcement personnel responsible for coordinating communication with the media. It may also be helpful to pre-program the media fax numbers into the department's fax line for easy reference when a case breaks.

3 PREPARE FOR COMMUNITY RESPONSE

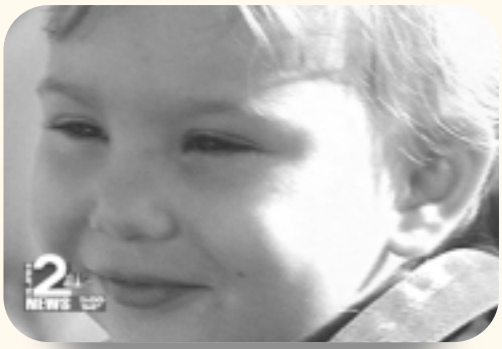
If viewers or listeners should call and request an AMBER Alert, your news staff should refer callers to their local law-enforcement agency to report the abduction. Your news staff can explain to callers that the decision to activate the AMBER Plan is determined only by law enforcement.

4 PROMOTE STAFF UNDERSTANDING OF THE EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEM

All members of the news division should be aware of how the EAS works and understand the format by which the alert will be sent out. The following format is an example of how the alert is programmed as a Civil Emergency Message.

EAS FORMAT

This is an example of the standard format that all broadcasters would follow when programming their EAS receivers. The only difference will be the message about the abduction.



- **Stop regular programming.**
- **Optional introduction or AMBER Alert activation.**
  "This is a — **Child Abduction Alert** — please stand by for important information."
- **One second pause (no audio).**
- **Send EAS Header Code three times (as required to trip EAS decoders).** The
  - Originator code must be "**EAS**."
  - Event code must be "**Civil Emergency Message**."
  - Location code must be the **County** where the abduction occurred.
  - Time code **(or duration)** should be two hours (+0200).
- **One-second pause (no audio).**
- **Eight second Attention Signal (853 and 960 Hz tones).**
- **Activation announcement.**
  "We interrupt our programming to activate the Emergency Alert System."

  "The (name of the investigating agency) requests activation of the Emergency Alert System to broadcast a (Child Abduction Alert, Update, or Cancellation) for (county where abduction occurred) until (clock time in two hours)."

- **AMBER Plan message.**
  The Metropolitan Police Department is searching for 10-year-old Amber Brown. She was abducted around 4 P.M. while riding her bicycle at the corner of Nebraska Avenue and Reno Road in Northwest, Washington.

  Amber is about 4 feet tall, weighs about 60 pounds, has short brown hair with brown eyes and is a Native American. She was wearing a blue T-shirt, blue jeans, and a blue baseball cap.

Police believe she was taken by a white man in his 20s. He is approximately 5 feet 10 inches tall, weighs 200 pounds, and has short black hair.

The suspect is driving a bright red Chevy van. It was last seen heading north on Connecticut Avenue toward 495. If you have any information regarding this abduction, immediately call the Metropolitan Police Department at 202-888-1212.

- **Termination announcement.**
  This has been a Child Abduction Alert. We now return to regular programming.

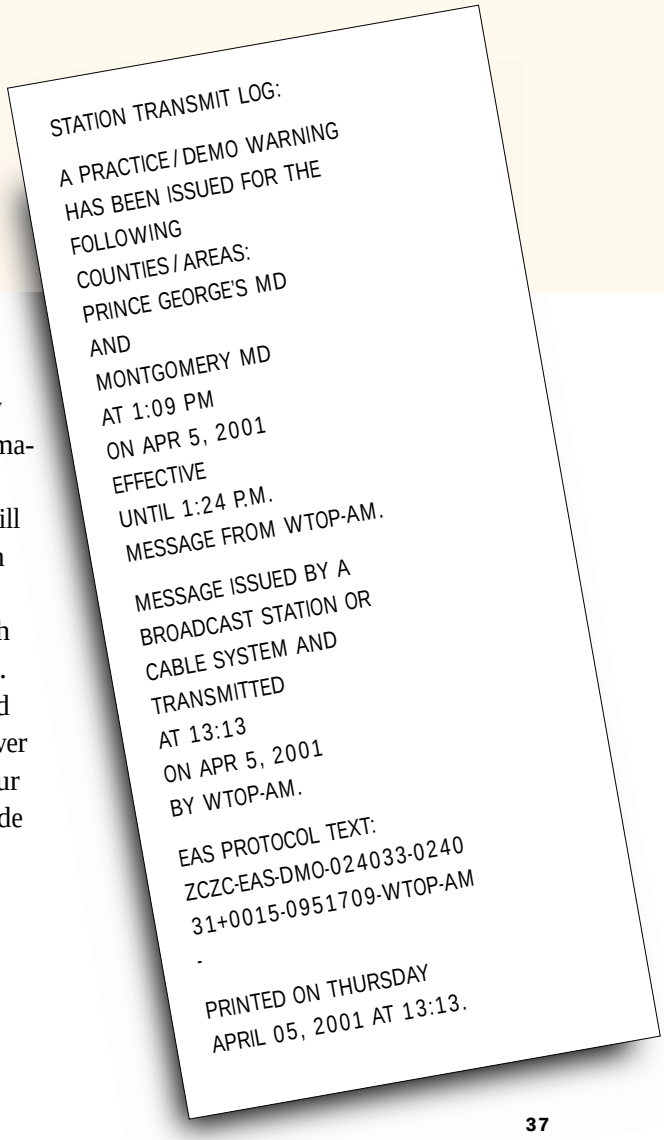
- **One second pause (no audio).**

- **Send EAS End-of-Message Code 3 times** (3 times is needed to release all EAS decoders).

- **Resume normal programming.**

Station Transmit Log

When the AMBER Alert is transmitted by the primary EAS stations, this is the information each broadcast station will receive via their EAS "decoder." Details of the alert will only come over in an audio message not in full text, so other methods of receiving the alert information should be developed such as by E-mail, web site, fax, or wire services. Otherwise someone at the station will need to transcribe the message as it is coming over the EAS so it can be rebroadcast unless your station sets its EAS to automatically override current programming.


STATION TRANSMIT LOG:

A PRACTICE / DEMO WARNING
HAS BEEN ISSUED FOR THE
FOLLOWING
COUNTIES / AREAS:
PRINCE GEORGE'S MD
AND
MONTGOMERY MD
AT 1:09 PM
ON APR 5, 2001
EFFECTIVE
UNTIL 1:24 P.M.
MESSAGE FROM WTOP-AM.

MESSAGE ISSUED BY A
BROADCAST STATION OR
CABLE SYSTEM AND
TRANSMITTED
AT 13:13
ON APR 5, 2001
BY WTOP-AM.

EAS PROTOCOL TEXT:
ZCZC-EAS-DMO-024033-0240
31+0015-0951709-WTOP-AM
-

PRINTED ON THURSDAY
APRIL 05, 2001 AT 13:13.

When a community is developing an AMBER Plan there are a number of key resources available that can provide assistance. These include NCMEC's Project ALERT, state clearinghouses, and nonprofit organizations. Each of these resources offers vital services during child-abduction cases, and NCMEC recommends that law enforcement look to their wealth of experience, knowledge, and contacts when implementing an AMBER Plan.

PROJECT ALERT

Often an investigating agency may not be prepared to handle a major child-abduction investigation. Faced with limited budgets, more than half of all law-enforcement agencies in the United States have fewer than 10 officers.[9] An important resource the agency can turn to is Project ALERT: America's Law Enforcement Retiree Team. Its mission is to offer free support to any agency that requests assistance in cases involving missing, abducted, or sexually exploited children. Project ALERT team members are seasoned retirees who bring a wealth of knowledge and practical experience to any child-abduction investigation. All travel arrangements and costs associated with travel for the Project ALERT representative and resource materials are coordinated and paid for by NCMEC. Please contact the Director of NCMEC's Missing Children's Division or Project ALERT Manager for additional information or to request Project ALERT assistance by calling NCMEC's 24-hour Hotline at 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678).

LOCATER

LOCATER (**Lo**st **C**hild **A**lert **Te**chnology **R**esource) is NCMEC's latest technology to assist law-enforcement agencies in quickly recovering missing and abducted children. It's an advanced computer system with software that allows agencies to create posters of missing and abducted children for rapid distribution on the local, statewide, or national levels. Funds from a congressional grant enable NCMEC to offer LOCATER at no cost to law-enforcement agencies charged with investigating these types of cases. This system includes state-of-the-art computers, color printers, quality scanners, and three years of technical services and support. LOCATER offers more than 100 different poster templates for AMBER Alert information, missing adults, wanted persons, and crime alerts. Using LOCATER, agencies can instantly transmit high-quality posters via E-mail and broadcast fax to other agencies, the media, and the public. For more information contact the LOCATER Program at 703-837-6389 or 1-877-446-2632 x 6389.

[9] Brian A. Reaves and Andrew L. Goldberg. "Census of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies, 1996" in Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, June 1998, page 30.

STATE CLEARINGHOUSES

When developing your community AMBER Plan, NCMEC recommends involving your state clearinghouse. There are 50 state clearinghouses plus clearinghouses in the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Canada that can offer communities assistance during cases involving missing and sexually exploited children. NCMEC provides these agencies with training, technical assistance, and vital information to better assist them in handling these cases. State clearinghouses provide area law-enforcement agencies with networking, information dissemination, training development, data collection, and technical assistance. These agencies can be a tremendous asset to law enforcement and broadcasters creating a local, regional, or statewide AMBER Plan.

Funded through a private-sector initiative, NCMEC trains and equips clearinghouses to participate in "MissingKids/100,000," a program that enables them to submit missing-child cases directly to NCMEC's web site. When an AMBER Alert is activated these agencies can quickly send the alert information along with a photograph of the child to NCMEC so that it may be put on the www.missingkids.com web site.

Contact NCMEC's 24-hour Hotline at 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678) to obtain contact information about your state clearinghouse.

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

NCMEC believes that networking with other local nonprofit organizations (NPOs) brings us closer to the goal of finding missing-abducted children and protecting them from exploitation. For years NCMEC has been at the forefront of efforts to promote information sharing with and cooperation among these grassroots organizations. NCMEC believes these NPOs are a vital link in the community and can be a valuable resource when setting up an AMBER Plan. Once an alert is activated, these groups can assist law enforcement in mobilizing volunteers in the community to start searching for the child and suspect as well as distribute the AMBER Alert posters. They can also assist at the national level. If law enforcement receives a tip that an abducted child has been taken to another state, these groups can quickly get the alert information to that location. Currently there is a strong national network between the NPOs, state clearinghouses, and NCMEC.

The Association of Missing and Exploited Children's Organizations (AMECO) now maintains a Resource and Referral List of Nonprofit Organizations for the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. The list includes organizations throughout the United States and Canada that provide direct services, as stipulated by the Missing Children's Assistance Act, to families of missing and exploited children. AMECO also oversees these organizations to help ensure that they carry out their mission in an ethical and legitimate manner. Currently there are 38 nonprofit organizations in the United States and 12 in Canada that met the criteria for inclusion on the Resource List.

State clearinghouses provide area law-enforcement agencies with networking, information dissemination, training development, data collection, and technical assistance.

Please contact the Executive Director of AMECO to obtain information on an NPO near you.

Association of Missing and Exploited Children's Organizations
167 Washington Street
Norwell, MA 02061
Telephone 781-878-3033
Fax 781-878-0838
E-Mail ameco@dreamcom.net

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has created two generic television PSAs to show broadcasters how they can help find abducted and/or missing children. The PSAs show examples of children who are still missing long after their abductions including Morgan Nick of Arkansas and Jacob Wetterling of Minnesota. The narrator is actor Dennis Franz from "NYPD Blue." This VHS tape includes a customizable script that introduces a picture of the missing child and well-recognized spokesperson who makes a public appeal for help in recovering the child or locating witnesses. In many communities, broadcasters, athletes, your local sheriff, your local police chief, and members of the clergy are ideal candidates to voice your own PSA. A copy of these PSAs is being offered for free to law enforcement and broadcasters who request it. Each PSA runs 30 seconds in length. Research shows that PSAs are a powerful way broadcasters can get the word out to the public in addition to reporting the case during regular newscasts.

For more information please contact
Child Protection Division
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
U.S. Department of Justice
810 Seventh Street, NW
Washington, DC 20531
Telephone 202-616-3637
www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org

Local Plan

DALLAS/FORT WORTH AMBER PLAN

The original AMBER Plan in Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas, was set up as a local plan so that it could be easily managed and controlled. A local plan is the easiest type of AMBER Plan to create because it involves only one or two counties and/or a major city.

This AMBER Plan encompasses a population of about 4.5 million residents in northern Texas. The plan was established as a grassroots operation, incorporating eight television stations, one cable system, and 32 radio stations, all of which are members of the Association of Radio Managers. There are 45 area police and sheriffs' departments that are committed to the plan.

AUTHORITY TO ACTIVATE

Each investigating agency with a child-abduction case decides when to activate the alert. The initiating agency is responsible for sending the necessary information about the case to the primary EAS stations for distribution. Each agency determines who will be designated to authorize and send the alert information.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

Arlington Police Department
Public Information Office
817-459-5700

JEFFERSON COUNTY (KANSAS) AMBER ALERT

Jefferson County, Kansas, has a population of more than 18,000 residents. While it's located just 30 minutes from the city of Topeka, which has a local AMBER Plan, officials in Jefferson County wanted their own plan. Law enforcement did not want to burden the Topeka Police Department with getting their alert information out to local broadcasters. Since time is of the essence, they were concerned that Topeka might have pressing cases of its own to handle. The Jefferson County AMBER Alert is a partnership with the radio and television stations in Topeka, Kansas.

AUTHORITY TO ACTIVATE

First field units will gather and assess pertinent information at the scene of a reported child abduction. Then the sheriff, undersheriff, or captain will determine if the two criteria have been met to activate an AMBER Alert. If the criteria are met, a child-abduction notification sheet is completed and then faxed or called in to the agency's Emergency Communications Center for distribution to the media.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

Jefferson County Sheriff's Department
785-863-2765

Regional Plan

A regional plan should be used when you have a number of counties or states that are included in your broadcast area.

GREATER CINCINNATI CHILD ABDUCTION ALERT PROGRAM

The Child Abduction Alert Program was created for the tri-state region that encompasses not only the city of Cincinnati (Hamilton County) but northern Kentucky and southeastern Indiana. This region includes an estimated 2 million people. Since the city limits are close to one another, a system was needed to work with the 50 law-enforcement agencies in this tri-state area. A regional plan was chosen because within minutes a child can be taken across state lines. The Child Abduction Alert Program is a partnership between Cincinnati-based media organizations, northern Kentucky and Hamilton County, the Ohio Police Chief's Association, and the FBI.

AUTHORITY TO ACTIVATE

The responsibility and decision to activate the Child Abduction Alert Program will rest with the officer-in-charge of the investigating law-enforcement agency. If the case occurs within the jurisdiction of the Cincinnati Police Division, the investigating officer contacts a supervisor within the Personal Crimes Unit for approval. Surrounding agencies must contact the Cincinnati Police Communications Section for implementation of the alert.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

Cincinnati Police Division
Sergeant Dave Wuest
513-352-6933

Edgewood (Kentucky) Police Department
Chief Steve Vollman
859-331-5911

DC AMBER PLAN

The DC AMBER Plan was established for the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. This region includes the District of Columbia and parts of Maryland and Virginia. It has a population of more than 4 million. A regional plan was developed because the broadcast audience extends into two states and the District.

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) created the plan in cooperation with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children and area broadcasters. There are 36 law-enforcement agencies within this region that are actively participating in the plan who are members of COG as well as a number of non-COG agencies throughout the area.

AUTHORITY TO ACTIVATE

Once the criteria have been met, an alert can be activated by the investigating law-enforcement agency designated by COG. The investigating agency, or a designated agency assisting a participating non-COG member, will activate the alert by

- Typing the text of the message on the DC AMBER Plan web site at www.DCAMBERplan.com so that law enforcement, broadcasters, and the public can read the vital information about the case
- Sending the alert via E-mail and fax to the two EAS broadcast stations as well as to two wire services (Metro Networks and the Associated Press)
- Confirming the alert by telephone
- Transmitting the urgent bulletin to the participating broadcast stations and cable systems within the region via the Emergency Alert System
- Distributing it via law enforcement through normal regional and National Crime Information Center (NCIC) notifications

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

DC AMBER Plan Task Force
Lieutenant John Collier
703-792-7225

Statewide Plan

Another option is to create a statewide emergency alert plan. The advantage of this type of plan is that all law-enforcement agencies and media outlets across the state are operating under the same guidelines and procedures. If one consistent plan is created, there will be greater public awareness about the alert system; therefore, law enforcement will have the maximum public participation to recover the abducted child.

During an abduction situation the suspect may travel with the child through many cities and towns to elude law enforcement. If everyone is operating under the same plan, concerned individuals throughout that state will recognize the urgent bulletin and automatically know they need to be on the lookout for the child and abductor.

Many of the statewide plans currently in place use a state agency to facilitate the alert system.

OKLAHOMA AMBER PLAN

In Oklahoma the governor established the Oklahoma AMBER Plan and designated the Department of Public Safety (DPS) to coordinate the alerts. This agency was chosen because it employs troopers from across the state 24 hours a day through its Highway Patrol division. No other agency has this service. The plan is a cooperative agreement between the Office of the Governor, the Department of Public Safety, the Oklahoma Association of Broadcasters (OAS), and various law-enforcement agencies. The OAS provided the necessary equipment for the department and a telephone line was installed to the Clear Channel News Network offices for dissemination over the statewide EAS.

AUTHORITY TO ACTIVATE

Participating local law-enforcement agencies must be certified by the governor's office to participate in the program. Certification is based on knowledge of the criteria, a supervising office, and resources to handle incoming telephone calls.

Once an investigating agency in Oklahoma determines a child-abduction case meets the AMBER Alert criteria, they should

- Complete a standard form and transmit the alert to the Highway Patrol dispatcher via a statewide law-enforcement network called OLETS (Oklahoma Law Enforcement Telecommunications System).
- Record the information and immediately activate the system through Clear Channel News Network and disseminate the information to all participating radio and television stations throughout the state.
- Understand that Clear Channel Network serves only as the conduit for the transmission of the alert. And the EAS is used only for the initial AMBER alert.
- Request stations to re-transmit the alert bulletin every 30 minutes for the next two hours and one time per hour for the following three hours.
- Transmit photographs, as soon as they are available, through OHP to the television stations.
- Understand that a web site is also being developed for AMBER Alert information.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT
Office of the Governor of Oklahoma
Kenny Goza
405-521-2342

FLORIDA AMBER PLAN (FLORIDA EMERGENCY MISSING CHILD ALERT-FEMCA)

The Florida AMBER Plan was established as a partnership between the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), Department of Community Affairs – Division of Emergency Management (DCA / DEM), Florida Association of Broadcasters (FAB), and FCC. What's unique about this plan is that it is set up to issue regional and / or statewide alerts depending on the needs of the particular case and has two levels of activation.

AUTHORITY TO ACTIVATE
FDLE is the point of contact on all alerts that are issued. When a local investigating agency has a report of an abducted child, the agency should immediately

- Contact the Florida Department of Law Enforcement Missing Children Information Clearinghouse (MCIC) (24 hours, 7 days a week) at 1-888-356-4774
- Tell the person answering the telephone that you have a child abduction and want to activate FEMCA

FDLE / MCIC will

- Determine, along with the local law-enforcement agency, what information is to be broadcast and where that information will go
- Fax the information to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) which transmits the message through the Emergency Alert System for stations to broadcast

If the alert does not meet the criteria for emergency activation, the agency may request that the information be faxed to the local radio / television stations with a request that they broadcast the information at their first opportunity.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT
Florida Department of Law Enforcement
Donna Hodges
1-888-356-4774 x 8578

ARKANSAS MORGAN NICK ALERT

The Morgan Nick Alert is a statewide plan that is managed and activated by the Arkansas State Police. It's a unique plan that gives every investigating agency two immediate options if they need assistance with an abducted-child case.

- If a sheriff or police department responds to a missing-child case and the circumstances meet the criteria for using the EAS, the information and a digital photograph are E-mailed to the Arkansas State Police headquarters in Little Rock. At that point the state police approve the request. Then a telecommunications operator will record the alert message and transmit it through the EAS to broadcast stations statewide.

- If the circumstances of the case do not meet EAS standards, but an investigating agency wants to notify surrounding agencies about the case, the same protocol is used. The sheriff, chief, or agency command officer signs off on the request and E-mails it to state police headquarters. But, instead of transmitting the message via EAS to broadcasters, the information and photograph are automatically E-mailed to all sheriff and police agencies in the surrounding areas and throughout the state if necessary. While the case may not be urgent enough for broadcasters to break into programming, the investigating agency still has a way to get regional or statewide assistance.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT
Arkansas State Police Headquarters
501-618-8200

Setting Up Criteria

AGE REQUIREMENT

NCMEC recommends that an alert be activated when a "child" has been abducted. Use of the word "child" is preferred instead of "juvenile" because juvenile connotes teenage years. This general recommendation allows each community to assign its own particular age for activation as the community deems necessary.

The original AMBER Plan requires the child to be 15 years old or younger, or older with a proven mental or physical disability. The Arlington (Texas) Police Department believes 15 years of age is the most appropriate age because teenagers usually get their driver's licenses at 16, and this is when they see a majority of runaway cases. Another consideration was the fact that teenagers are legal adults at 17 years of age in Texas. Other plans set different criteria.

- The Florida AMBER Plan (Florida Emergency Missing Child Alert) says the child must be younger than 18 years of age for an activation to be considered
- The DC AMBER Plan states that the child must be 14 years of age or younger, or a child 15 through 17 years of age under certain circumstances
- The Morgan Nick Alert stipulates that the child be younger than 12 years of age for an activation to occur. The age of consent in Arkansas is 16

As these examples show, the ages for an alert can vary greatly. Each community must decide at what age it believes activation of the alert will be the most effective and not overused.

CIRCUMSTANCES

NCMEC believes the emergency alert plan should only be used for serious child-abduction cases. It should not normally be used for runaway or parental-abduction cases, the two leading causes of missing children. The only cause for an alert under these circumstances would be if law enforcement believes the life of the child is in severe danger (*e.g.*, if a parent threatened to harm the child). Each case will need to be judged on an individual basis. These decisions will need to be addressed by each agency creating a community AMBER Plan.

Circumstances where an AMBER Alert WOULD be activated include a

- Child is abducted and there are witnesses to the crime.
- Child is missing but there is evidence of foul play, and law enforcement believes the child was abducted.
- Vehicle was stolen or "carjacked" and a child was left inside the vehicle.
- Child is missing and particular consideration is given to their behavior or mental capacity in some way contributing to their disappearance. The child is also considered endangered.

Circumstances where an AMBER Alert WOULD NOT be activated include

- A child is missing and law enforcement has no evidence of foul play
- A child runs away from home
- A child is missing as a result of a custody dispute and the child is not considered to be at risk of bodily harm or death
- An adult is missing
- Authorities are looking for wanted criminals who are bank robbers or alleged murder suspects in adult crimes

It should be emphasized that although the AMBER Alert is not appropriate in the circumstances stated above, law-enforcement agencies can still alert the media to these cases. This should be done, however, through standard news procedures by sending a press release or alerting the media by telephone. The stations can then determine whether or not to air the incident in their regular newscasts.

DETAILS OF THE CRIME

An emergency alert plan works best when law enforcement has a description of the child, abductor, and/or vehicle used in the abduction. Unfortunately not every case will have an eyewitness to furnish those details, so detectives may want to consider evidence of foul play to activate the alert.

LAW-ENFORCEMENT CHECKLIST

To help ensure the plan is used properly and not overused, a few communities with established AMBER Plans have law-enforcement checklists. These checklists are an extra safety measure to assist law enforcement in assessing the child-abduction case and determining whether or not an AMBER Alert is appropriate.

OKLAHOMA AMBER PLAN CHECKLIST

1 Is the kidnapping one in which the child victim is 15 years of age or younger?

If YES, Answer Question 5.

If NO, Answer Question 2.

2 Is the kidnapping one in which the child victim has a proven mental or physical disability?

If YES, Answer Question 5.

If NO, Answer Question 3.

3 Was the child kidnapping witnessed by anyone?

If YES, Answer Question 5.

If NO, Answer Question 4.

4 Did the child kidnapping involve acts of violence?

If YES, ACTIVATE THE AMBER PLAN.

If NO, Answer Question 5.

5 Do you believe the child to be in danger of serious bodily harm or death?

If YES, ACTIVATE THE AMBER PLAN.

If NO, DO NOT ACTIVATE THE AMBER PLAN.

6 The alert must contain a description of the child and details of the abduction. Law enforcement should carefully consider not activating the plan if there is no information to send out.

Supplemental Methods of Distributing AMBER Alert Information

ASSOCIATED PRESS, CITY NEWS SERVICE, AND EDIS

The C.A.R.E Alert in Orange County, California, uses the Associated Press wire service and City News Service to activate these urgent alert bulletins. In the event that a child-abduction case is confirmed, the investigating agency prepares a special fax form that includes all available information about the abduction and surrounding circumstances. This alert form is then faxed to the Associated Press and City News Service. These news services will immediately send the alert information over the wires for all media outlets to receive simultaneously. Each station will then broadcast the alert information.

The State of California's "Emergency Digital Information Service" (EDIS) is a unique statewide system for emergency public notification and information. EDIS disseminates text bulletins, digital photographs, and audio from authorized agencies to the public and the news media in California. The alerts are distributed via E-mail, pager, satellite, and the Internet.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

Orange County Sheriff's Department
714-647-7418
Attention: Sergeant Christine Murray

Attorney General's Office
Office of Victim Services
877-433-9069
Attention: Nina Salarno, Director

E-MAIL

In Texas the Houston Regional AMBER Plan is the first in the country to use an Internet E-mail system as a way to send the AMBER Alert information after it is first delivered through the EAS.

The plan uses two web sites: one for administrative purposes that is exclusive to law-enforcement agencies and broadcasters and a second one for the public at www.amber-plan.net.

Once a child-abduction case has been confirmed, the law-enforcement agency will either fax or E-mail the case information to the primary radio station, KTRH. The news editor at KTRH will then put the message into proper EAS format as well as into clear, concise copy for broadcast. The news editor will then call back the investigating agency and get final approval on the copy for broadcast. The approved message is then posted to the plan's public web site before it is broadcast on KTRH using EAS. KTRH will also E-mail and broadcast fax (or blast fax) the message to other participating broadcasters and print media outlets, law-enforcement agencies, and AMBER Plan partners in the area.

The E-mail system is an important component of the Houston Regional AMBER Plan because it allows the entire text of the AMBER Alert to be delivered instantly and simultaneously to everyone in the area who needs the information.

Currently the EAS only allows text transmission of event codes such as Civil Emergency Message and an audio message of the AMBER Alert. That means broadcasters must transcribe the voice message for rebroadcast in order for it to be used as a "crawl" across television screens similar to those used in weather emergencies. Sending the alert by E-mail gives everyone involved with the plan immediate access to the wording of the alert so they can quickly relay the information to officers on the beat, broadcast listeners, or the public.

The Houston Regional AMBER Plan's public web site posts all AMBER Alert bulletins with detailed information about the crime and a photograph of the abducted child. The web site also provides valuable resource information for families of missing children.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

Houston Police Department
713-308-8019
Attention: Captain George Buenik

KTRH-AM 740
713-630-3598
Attention: News Director Bryan Erickson

BLAST FAX

The Kansas City (Missouri) AMBER Alert Plan is activated through a blast fax system that disseminates information about a serious child-abduction case to area broadcasters. The original policies and procedures were developed by the Kansas City (Missouri) Police Department (KCPD) that coordinates activations of the plan. The plan is overseen by the Metropolitan Police Chiefs and

Supplemental Methods of Distributing AMBER Alert Information *continued*

Sheriff's Association, which is a bi-state (Missouri and Kansas) association comprised of all Kansas City area local, state, and federal law-enforcement agencies.

When an investigating agency decides an alert is necessary, agency personnel fill out a Child Abduction Notification Sheet with details about the case and fax it to the KCPD media office. The media officer on duty will then get final approval for the alert from the Metro Squad Board, a group of appointed police chiefs from the area. Once the alert is approved, the media office faxes the Child Abduction Notification sheet to the broadcast media. Then follow-up telephone calls are made to each station to make sure it received the information.

For more information, contact
The Kansas City Police Department
Attention: Major Vince McInerney
1125 Locust
Kansas City, Missouri 64106
816-234-5000

TELEPHONE CALLS

The North Carolina Child Alert Notification (NC CAN) System is initiated through telephone calls directly to the participating radio and television stations by the investigating agency. Once the NC CAN system is requested, the agency handling the case will follow up with a fax detailing the circumstances of the abduction. This fax will be sent via private or unpublished numbers for verification purposes. Upon notification and verification, the media outlets will interrupt regularly scheduled programming with the alert. NC CAN is currently being used in the Raleigh, North Carolina, area but there are plans to expand the system statewide.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

North Carolina Center for Missing Persons
1-800-522-5437 or 919-733-3557
Attention: John Goad

PASSWORDS

The Malcom Alert, which is used in Richland, Lexington, and Newberry counties of South Carolina, is activated by the EAS, but a password is given to verify the alert. Once the Richland County Sheriff's Department has confirmed a serious child-abduction case, it will call the private telephone lines set up by the two main EAS stations, WCOS and B-106, and proceed with activating the alert.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

Richland County Sheriff's Department
803-691-9000
Attention: Sheriff Leon Lott or
Lieutenant Joseph Pellicci

VOICE-BOX SYSTEM

The Greater Cincinnati Metropolitan Area "Child Abduction Alert Plan" is activated through a voice mailbox system. When an alert is deemed necessary, a Personal Crimes Unit supervisor within the Cincinnati Police Division will call the voice mailbox and leave an urgent message about the child-abduction case. The message will include descriptions of the child and suspect as well as information about the crime. The message will include the name, location, and call-back number of the officer in charge of the investigation and specific location for the media to meet for distribution of photographs of the child.

To verify the authenticity of the child abduction, the investigating agency requesting the alert will contact a single designated broadcast outlet and fax all the information recorded on the voice mailbox system. The broadcast outlet will then call the sending agency back to confirm the abduction and information. Once confirmed, the alert information will be distributed to all participating media outlets, which will then break into programming.

This plan is used in the Cincinnati, Ohio; northern Kentucky; and southeastern Indiana regions. It is a cooperative partnership between the Cincinnati media outlets, the Northern Kentucky and Hamilton County Police Chief's Associations, and the FBI.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

Cincinnati Police Division
Personal Crimes Unit
513-352-6932
Attention: Sergeant David Wuest

CHILD-ABDUCTION NOTIFICATION

URGENT URGENT URGENT

TO: KRLD-AM
WBAP-AM

MESSAGE:

We have confirmed a child abduction in our city. Please broadcast the following information:

This is an activation of the AMBER Alert System at the request of the Arlington Police Department.

The victim is a 2-month-old white female infant. Her name is Rae-Leigh Ann Bradbury. She has blond hair, blue eyes, 22 inches in length, 11 1/2 pounds, was last seen wearing a white top and white pants. Police believe she was taken by her babysitter, Sandra Joyce Fallis. Fallis is a white female 42 years of age, 5'3", 135 pounds with black hair and brown eyes. She's driving a turquoise 1993 Ford Ranger Splash pickup with a wooden flatbed bearing Texas license tag E-S-3-9-4-9. If you have any information about Rae-Leigh call 911.

POLICE DEPARTMENT'S CONTACT NAME AND PHONE NUMBER FOR VERIFICATION:

Public Information Officer

Memorandum of Understanding

Memorandum of Understanding
BETWEEN
(Law Enforcement Agency)
And
METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
HUMAN SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY POLICY COMMITTEE
POLICE CHIEFS COMMITTEE

This agreement governs the use of the "DC AMBER Plan" – a collaborative approach between Metropolitan Washington DC area law enforcement agencies, broadcasters and the Council of Governments (MWCOG) for response to the abduction of children. "AMBER" is an acronym for America's Missing: Emergency Broadcast Response, and is a protocol for alerting the public of a child abduction to solicit information useful in the investigation and recovery of abducted children.

LAW ENFORCEMENT:
The use of the DC AMBER Plan is permitted by the above agency upon the following circumstances:

- The agency head has established a Protocol, Special Order, General Order, or Standard Operating Procedure governing the use of the DC AMBER Plan, and;
- The agency's staff has been trained on the criteria for the activation, as well as the review process, and;
- The agency agrees not to trigger any alert where all four criteria as outlined in the plan has not been met, and;
- The agency has specified the person(s) within the agency authorized to activate the DC AMBER Plan, and provides MWCOG with that contact information, and;
- The agency has Internet access on a 24-hour basis.

MWCOG:

- Agrees to monitor the DC AMBER Plan, and to review all alerts to ensure compliance with the criteria, and;
- Agrees to maintain the conduit through which to file suggestions, or grievances pertaining to the use of the DC AMBER Plan, and;
- Agrees to maintain an internet WEB site known as www.DCAMBERplan.com, issue and revise "Username" and "password" lists, and;
- Agrees to maintain liaison with the Washington DC area Broadcasters to administer the DC AMBER Plan.

MODIFICATION and TERMINATION of AGREEMENT:
This agreement may be modified at anytime the parties listed herein deem necessary. Suggested modifications to this agreement shall be developed in writing and distributed to each party for their review and comment. A modification to this agreement is approved or rejected by mutual consensus of the MWCOG Police Chiefs Committee. Any party may terminate their participation in this agreement by submitting written notice of their withdrawal to the other parties. A termination notice shall be provided at least 30 days in advance of the effective date of such termination.

EFFECTIVE DATE:
The terms and conditions of this agreement shall become effective on the date that the representative of the requesting party signs this agreement. The provisions of this agreement shall remain in full force and effect until such time that this agreement is modified or terminated by the parties.

SIGNATURE:

_____	_____
LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY HEAD	DATE
_____	_____
REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS	DATE

For MWCOG Use Only:
Username: _____

Temporary password : _____

Temporary password issued upon signing this agreement. _____

Contact MWCOG to change password for security purposes after agreement is received.

Sample Letter to Broadcasters

NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN
www.missingkids.com

August 15, 2001

Mr. Thomas Grooms
WJZW-FM
4400 Jenifer Street
Washington, DC 20015

Dear Mr. Grooms:

Time is critical when a child is abducted. That's why it is important to have a rapid response plan in place when a tragedy strikes your community. The AMBER Plan – **A**merica's **M**issing **B**roadcast **E**mergency **R**esponse is the answer. I am writing to request your station's participation in implementing this important program here in the Washington, DC, area. Thirty-three police chiefs within the Washington Metropolitan Council of Governments (COG) have already endorsed the plan. Now we need local broadcasters' support to put the plan into action.

The AMBER Plan is a unique partnership between law-enforcement agencies and the media to interrupt programming to broadcast an urgent alert in the most serious child-abduction cases. It's the same concept used during severe weather emergencies. It was established in 1996 after the abduction and brutal murder of 9-year-old Amber Hagerman from Arlington, Texas. In response to community concern after this tragedy, the Association of Radio Managers teamed up with local law enforcement in northern Texas and created this powerful tool.

Interest in the AMBER Plan is sweeping across the country with 27 similar plans currently in operation in the United States. Already the concept has been credited with saving the lives of at least 16 children. This fall, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) will officially launch the program nationwide with help from the National Association of Broadcasters, the Fraternal Order of Police, members of Congress, the National Sheriffs' Association, and the International Association of Chiefs of Police. Our hope is to create a partnership with your station that will establish a local child-abduction alert program (see enclosed) that will not only recover abducted children but also act as a deterrent to this type of crime.

To discuss this important partnership, NCMEC and COG invite you to a luncheon meeting on August 30, 2001, at Noon. Please reply no later than August 20. I can be reached at 703-837-6388.

Thank you so much for your time, and we look forward to discussing this successful community program with you. Remember, working together we can bring abducted children home.

Sincerely,

Joann Donnellan
Media Relations Manager

Conclusion

Although the AMBER Plan was created out of a tragedy, it is now a symbol of hope to communities around the nation as a way to battle serious child abductions. Those representatives who use this AMBER Alert kit are encouraged to take the recommendations, facts, statistics, resources, samples, and other materials and tailor an effective AMBER Plan to fit the needs of your community. The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children wants to emphasize that this plan was not designed to be a competitive tool between broadcasters nor an overused tool by law enforcement. The single most important issue at stake is the well-being of the abducted child. And more importantly, as you begin to create your own AMBER Plan, always remember how the program began and that the Arlington (Texas) Police Department is still searching for the man who kidnapped and murdered 9-year-old Amber Hagerman.

WHO KILLED

AMBER HAGERMAN?

On Saturday, January 13, 1996, 9-year-old Amber Hagerman was abducted while riding her bicycle in a parking lot between the old Winn-Dixie building and a laundromat at the corner of E. Abram St. and Browning Dr. in Arlington, Texas. It happened around 3:15 P.M. The unknown suspect dragged Amber into his truck and fled westbound on Abram St. Amber's body was found four days later on January 17, at 11:30 P.M. in a drainage ditch located in the Forest Ridge Apartment complex on Green Oaks Blvd.

Suspect Description: White or Hispanic male, shorter than 6 feet tall with a medium build between 25-40 years old.

Suspect Characteristics: Suspect may currently own or may have owned a full-size black pickup truck. He may have trouble holding a job and probably works in a job that does not require much contact with people. The suspect may have an anger-control problem, be violent at times, and have suffered some type of stressful event prior to January 13, 1996. He may live alone or with an elderly person, have poor relations with women, and have few friends or be a loner. He may frequently carry a knife.

Suspect Vehicle Description: A full-size American-made black pickup truck, in clean condition that is probably a late 1980s to early 1990s model with a standard cab and equipment.

ANYONE HAVING INFORMATION SHOULD CONTACT

Tarrant County Crime Stoppers 1-871-469-TIPS