

STATE OF ILLINOIS

AMBER ALERT NOTIFICATION PLAN

(Public Act 92-0259)

CONCEPT

During the summer of 2001, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) launched the "AMBER Plan"-- America's **M**issing: **B**roadcast **E**mergency **R**esponse initiative nationwide. NCMEC's goal is to assist communities across the country in establishing local "AMBER" programs to increase the chances of recovering abducted and endangered children. According to a study by the Justice Department, three quarters of the children who are kidnaped and later found murdered were killed within the first three hours after being taken. In 1996, nine-year-old Amber Hagerman was abducted while playing near her home in Arlington, Texas, and later found murdered. In response to community concern, the Texas Association of Radio Managers (ARMS), with the assistance of Texas' local area law enforcement, created the AMBER Plan which provided timely information about area child abductions to local listeners.

The above-mentioned statistics prompted Illinois Legislators to pass Public Act 92-0259 (new) - AN ACT concerning missing children (20 ILCS 2605/2605-480) in the General Assembly on May 15, 2001, which was subsequently approved on August 7, 2001. The bill mandates the Illinois State Police (ISP) develop and implement a coordinated emergency alert plan which would make information regarding abducted and endangered children immediately available to the citizens of Illinois. As a result of their efforts and with the assistance of the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA), Illinois Broadcasters Association (IBA), Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), Illinois Sheriffs' Association, Illinois State Clearinghouse for Missing and Exploited Children, Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and the St. Louis Area Regional Abduction Alert (SARAA) Committee, the "AMBER Alert Notification Plan" was developed for the state of Illinois.

CRITERIA FOR THE AMBER ALERT NOTIFICATION PLAN ACTIVATION

The **original** criteria for activation of the AMBER Plan defined "abduction" as an *incident involving a child under 18, unwillingly removed from their environment without permission from the child's legal guardian or representative*. The intent of the AMBER Plan was to be used for abductions involving strangers. However, this criteria did not take into account the possible involvement of babysitters and others.

Since the inception of the AMBER Plan, several police representatives have voiced concern to safeguard the continued success of this alert system. Although each case has its own set of circumstances, law

enforcement agencies must follow the abduction criteria as closely as possible.

After weeks of discussion, a special committee made up of police and broadcast representatives from the Arlington, Texas, area came up with new guidelines to activate the AMBER Plan. The state of Illinois agrees with the new guidelines. As a result, to activate the AMBER Alert Notification Plan in Illinois, law enforcement agencies **must** ensure the following criteria are met:

- 1. Law enforcement must confirm a child has been abducted.**
- 2. The child must be under the age of 16 or have a proven mental or physical disability.**
- 3. Police must believe the child is in danger of serious bodily harm or death.**
- 4. There is enough descriptive information about the child, abductor, and/or suspect's vehicle to believe an immediate broadcast alert will help.**

If all criteria are *not* met, the AMBER Alert Notification Plan should *not* be activated. Both law enforcement and broadcasters have agreed that the Plan should not be used for runaways. Also, while each case must be judged individually, most "child custody" situations do not meet the criteria.

THE ACTIVATION PROCESS

Activation of the AMBER Alert Notification Plan can be initiated by a local law enforcement agency or by ISP. If for any reason the local law enforcement agency is unavailable, ISP will conduct the investigation. Once the contacted agency receives a report, the following process should be followed:

1. confirm that an abduction has taken place and the criteria have been met,
2. Call ISP Springfield Communication Center (SCC), and complete the pre-established two page facsimile packet available in the forms section of LEADS and on the Illinois AMBER Alert website at www.amberillinois.org
 - the facsimile message must include detailed information which could be helpful to the public in identifying the child,
 - designate a department contact for ISP SCC (include a name and telephone number on the standardized facsimile form),
 - designate a secondary number to list for media contacts,
 - Obtain a photo for posting and forward to ISP
 - local law enforcement agencies must follow intra-departmental policy regarding the actual investigation process involving any abducted/kidnaped child incident which takes place within their jurisdiction. The jurisdiction shall maintain contact with the Illinois AMBER Alert Coordinator.

- Disseminate necessary abduction information via a LEADS/NLETS message (sent LUUU). ISPERN messages shall be coordinated through the ISP district of occurrence,
 - The portrait of the child should be forwarded electronically along with a copy of all abduction details/summaries to the ISP Clearinghouse for Missing and Exploited Children Manager (missing@isp.state.il.us).
- Telephone #: 800/843-5763
 - Facsimile #: 217/558-7152
3. after being contacted by the reporting agency, ISP SCC will conduct the following tasks:
- confirm with the reporting agency to verify receipt of the AMBER Alert Notification Plan information,
 - Contact DOO Clearinghouse personnel to verify criteria,
 - Contact NWS and advise of a forthcoming NOAA AMBER Alert,
 - Script AMBER Alert message and send using NOAA weather radio Emergency Alert System (EAS),
 - Call NWS and confirm receipt of message,
 - As a secondary notification to broadcasters, complete the electronic AMBER Alert Blastfax Form and disseminate,
 - Notify IDOT and Tollway with necessary information to activate electronic road message boards,
 - Provide secondary dissemination to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) to be used for the activation of Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) for cell phone users.
4. after receiving notification via NOAA EAS and/or blastfax, the broadcasters can either transcribe the information included in the faxed AMBER Alert Notification Plan or rebroadcast the NOAA EAS message,
- a rebroadcast of the alert **should** be conducted at a minimum of every 30 minutes for at least four hours (not to exceed eight hours) after the notification was received,
 - the decision to rebroadcast the AMBER Alert Notification Plan information at a later time will be left up to each individual broadcasting station and is completely voluntary,

The above-mentioned steps provide an efficient and streamlined approach in disseminating detailed information regarding an abducted child whose life may be in danger. The goal of this notification process is to be quick, clear, concise, uncluttered, and effective.

CANCELING THE ALERT/LOCATING THE CHILD

Subsequent updates (within eight hours from the time of abduction) from your department shall be provided to the Illinois AMBER Alert Coordinator. If the child has been located or upon closure of the child abduction case, call ISP SCC or complete the AMBER Alert Notification Plan Cancellation Form and fax it to ISP SCC. The ISP SCC will notify NWS and broadcasters of the cancellation. After eight hours of the abduction any updates/cancellations should be made directly to the Illinois AMBER Alert Coordinator (800/843-5763).

SUMMARY

The “AMBER Alert Notification Plan” provides a valuable tool for Illinois law enforcement agencies in the ongoing battle to protect our children while allowing the broadcasters of Illinois an opportunity to contribute to the communities they serve in an extremely beneficial capacity. The object of the Alert is to utilize the public to find a child and quickly return the child home. Throughout the years numerous children have been returned safely as a direct result of AMBER Alert Activations.

For more information, please contact:

- Manager, Illinois State Clearinghouse for Missing and Exploited Children, 800/843-5763.