

THE AMBER ADVOCATE

THE BEGINNING OF

AMBER[®] ALERT



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**AMBER[®]
ALERT**

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Your story ideas and pictures are welcome.

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IN THE BEGINNING: HOW THE AMBER ALERT PLAN BEGAN

Two phone calls, one letter, and perhaps some divine intervention was all it took to get the AMBER Alert Plan started, according to Diana Simone. When the Fort Worth mother heard that the body of 9-year-old Amber Hagerman had been found, she was overcome with grief. Amber was murdered after someone in a truck grabbed her from her bicycle on January 13, 1996,

"It was devastating to think she was kidnapped in broad daylight," said Simone. "It's impossible to me that you can drive in a densely populated area and not be seen. The problem isn't that no one saw them but that no one knew what they were seeing."

Simone remembered being in Israel a decade earlier when a 3-year-old American girl went missing. The child's mother was hysterical, but an Israeli woman told her to sit down and have some coffee because her child would be returned shortly.

Simone heard people walking through the crowds giving the description of the missing girl. Within minutes the child was found. Simone thought Americans would also care and respond to a missing child, but they needed a tool to communicate. After hearing about Amber's death, she thought cell phones might be the best way to alert the public.

She shared her inspiration for an alert with Rev. Tom Stoker, a Baptist Church music minister. "How about the radio?" Stoker asked. "Do you think they would do that?" Simone replied.

Later that same day, Simone called her favorite radio station, KDMX, and presented the idea of a "broadcast alert" for abducted children to mid-day host Kim Ashley. Ashley jumped on the idea and convinced Simone to call station manager Jennifer Grimm. The station manager asked Simone to write a letter with details of the plan.

Simone wrote, "I would like to suggest an emergency system be set up so that when a verified 911 call is placed, all the radio stations in the area would be notified immediately and they would interrupt programming to broadcast an emergency alert, giving whatever information and descriptions that are pertinent...My one request is that it be known as Amber's Plan." (See the entire letter on pg. 5)

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Diana Simone

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Grimm then brought Simone's letter to the Radio and TV Managers Association in Fort Worth. WBAP News/Talk 820 Operations Manager Tyler Cox loved the idea, and he went to work with other broadcasters to start it.

"It's truly an example of people putting aside their differences and something cool happening," said Cox. "When it came to this---we were of one mind."

Cox contacted Dee Anderson, the public information officer for the Arlington Police Department, the agency that was investigating Amber Hagerman's murder. Together they developed the following criteria for the alert:

- The child must be 15 years old or younger.
- Law enforcement must believe the child has been abducted or missing with the threat of serious bodily injury or death.
- Enough information must be available for the public to help.

Mark Simpson, the former Arlington, Texas Police Sergeant who supervised the case, explained that the age was chosen, "because you can get a hardship driver's license in Texas at 15, and they can take better care of themselves. We also thought it would limit the number of AMBER alerts."

The AMBER Alert Plan allowed every law enforcement agency to determine the criteria and issue the alert. The agency would send a fax to dedicated fax machines at the two primary Emergency Alert System (EAS) stations in Dallas-Fort Worth. The stations in the area divided themselves up and re-transmitted the information so every broadcaster would receive the AMBER Alert and broadcast the alerts every 15 minutes. Simpson said the "most obnoxious tone possible" was used to begin every alert so everyone would take notice.

"The system is so simple and easy to run and main-

tain. It doesn't cost taxpayers one plug penny," said Cox. "This is something we can do to do good in the community at no financial resource risk to anyone. Radio is in business 24 hours a day, police run 24 hours a day, and people find children--end of story."



WBAP News/Talk 820 Operations Manager Tyler Cox

"It's truly an example of people putting aside their differences and something cool happening," said Cox. "When it came to this - we were of one mind."



Former Arlington, Texas Police Sergeant Mark Simpson

Everyone had high hopes, but the AMBER Alert did not work the first time. It did not work the second time either. Some people were prepared to scrap the whole idea if it did not work the third time. The third AMBER Alert was issued in November 1998 for 8-week-old Rae Leigh Bradbury. The child's parents called the Arlington Police Department at 10 p.m. after the babysitter did not bring her home at 5 p.m.

Sergeant Simpson was called in to investigate, and he learned the babysitter had a crack habit. He feared the baby would be traded for drugs or be left out in the cold. The AMBER Alert was activated at 7:00 a.m. the next morning. Thirty minutes later a motorist called 911 and said he spotted the suspect driving a Ford truck. Officers from the Grand Prairie Police Department stopped the suspect and safely recovered the child.

"Up to that point, I didn't have any clues where she was," said Simpson. "The AMBER Alert allowed us to recover the child. This is a good example of how the AMBER Alert works and the power it has."

Soon, other law enforcement agencies started asking about the new AMBER Alert Plan. "We really didn't think it would get so big," said Simpson. "It just caught on."

But Cox believed the idea would spread. "We thought we had something here," he said.

He knew the AMBER Alert had arrived when it was part of a television police drama. "I nearly fell out of my chair. The AMBER Alert had become a household name."

Diana Simone said she also expected the AMBER Alert to have a big impact. "I believe in the goodness of people, and if it works here, it can work anywhere."

The AMBER Alert eventually became a national initiative and an acronym: America's Missing Broadcast Emergency Response. More than 500 children abducted in the United States have been recovered through AMBER Alerts. AMBER Alert Plans are sprouting up all over the world. The alerts now go out on radio and TV, highway signs, and many other ways, including Simone's original idea—cell phones.

The success of the AMBER Alert led several people to claim to have invented it. These claims trouble the broadcasters and law enforcement officers who helped set up the first AMBER Alert Plan.

"No one involved took credit because everyone looked at it as a collaborative effort," said Simpson. "If there was ever a multi-agency effort to do something for kids-this is it."

"If you feel you have to claim you originated the AMBER Alert, then your heart wasn't with it in the first place," added Cox. "This was truly a collaborative effort and it needs to be remembered that way."

Even Simone said the credit should go to the people who continue to use the AMBER Alert to save children. "They are the heroes. Without the men and women looking for children it would be completely ineffective."



THE LETTER THAT LAUNCHED AMBER ALERT

Jennifer Grim
KDMX 102-9 FM
Addison, Texas

Dear Jennifer,

As we discussed on the telephone Friday, January 19, concerning the Amber Hagerman tragedy, it occurred to me that in the vast majority of abduction cases we hear about, children are being put into vehicles and transported from the point of abduction, point A, to somewhere, point B. Considering the population density of the metroplex area, that seems virtually impossible to complete without being seen by someone. In Amber's case, for example, I'm sure a number of people saw her in that black pickup truck but simply did not know what they were seeing. To remedy this, I would like to suggest an emergency system be set up so that when a verified 911 call is placed, all the radio stations in the area would be notified immediately and they would interrupt programming to broadcast an emergency alert, giving whatever information and descriptions that are pertinent. In this way, thousands of people would be alerted within minutes of an occurrence, greatly minimizing the chance of successful escape. Naturally, citizens would be advised not to interfere, but simply call in any sightings of the suspect vehicle or persons.

Also, a great number of my colleagues and clients feel that this type of a response system may act as a strong deterrent, since possible perpetrators would be aware that virtually everyone on the roads etc. would be looking for them.

I want to thank you and Kim Ashly for your interest and support of this idea. I sincerely hope this plan or something similar be enacted so children of the Dallas/Ft. Worth area may experience their childhood as a time of joy, rather than one of fear and apprehension.

If you are able to gather support of this Emergency Broadcast Plan, my one request is that it be known as Amber's Plan.

Sincerely,

Diana Simone

FAMILIES SHINE LIGHT ON CHILD ABDUCTIONS



“We are surviving parents, and this is our job: to fight for laws and make sure programs are funded and doing what is needed to protect children.”



At the 2009 National AMBER Alert Symposium, family members of child abduction victims held a candlelight vigil for all victims. A large crowd joined more than 40 family members as they offered a prayer, sang songs, and lit a candle to expose the dark crimes committed against children.

“The life of every child in America is important, and as a nation, we must make the needed changes so no one will ever lose a child again,” said Ed Smart, father of Elizabeth Smart.

The vigil was prompted by the recent news of 7-year-old Somer Thompson, a Florida girl who was discovered in a Georgia landfill 2 days after she was discovered missing, and 9-year-old Elizabeth Olten, who was abducted and murdered on October 21, 2009, in Missouri.

“We are surviving parents, and this is our job: to fight for laws and make sure programs are funded and doing what is needed to protect children,” says Mark Lunsford, father of Jessica Lunsford. “God speed the healing these families will need to go through and God’s strength in their fight to protect them.”

Many of the family members are also members of the Surviving Parent’s Coalition, a not-for-profit organization founded in 2008 to advocate for legislation that will aid in the prevention of crimes against children and young people, especially child sexual abuse, sexual assault, exploitation, and murder.

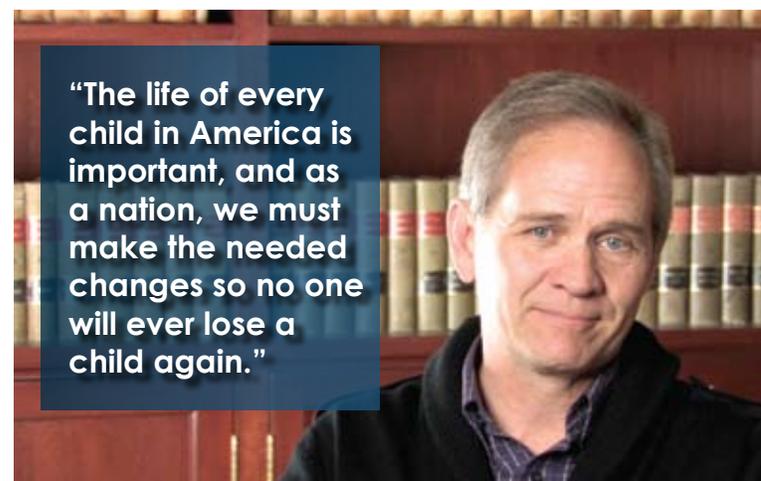
Erin Runnion, mother of Samantha Runnion added, “We aim to raise awareness and determination among parents everywhere to honor these children by taking pro-active action to educate and

empower our children and parents so that not one more child is victimized.”

The symposium included the largest gathering ever of family members for the Family Roundtable, which provides a platform for family members to share their personal and often painful experiences. The roundtable presented their findings to the symposium on how they believe child abduction cases can be handled better, including:

- Secure the home quickly to protect evidence, and interview all potential suspects as soon as possible.
- Invite Child Abduction Response Teams (CARTs) to help in the case, and make sure a victim advocate is part of the team.
- Consider the impact on the family before deciding on the location of the Command Post.
- Use tracking dogs, when possible, to help in the search.

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“The life of every child in America is important, and as a nation, we must make the needed changes so no one will ever lose a child again.”

A HEART FOR AMBER ALERTS IN INDIAN COUNTRY

Mark Hill had just celebrated his 50th birthday when he started packing his bags for the National AMBER Alert Symposium. Another milestone for the communications engineer for Gila River Indian Community was that he was being named the 2009 AMBER Alert Coordinator of the Year.

Those plans came to an abrupt halt when Hill had a heart attack. Doctors operated and allowed him to go home the next day. "I told the doctors I could still catch a plane to Florida," said Hill. "They told me it was way too early to fly because too many problems could happen."

Hill missed the symposium, but his heart has been with the AMBER Alert program ever since he started with the Gila River Police Department. Former Police Chief Reynolds Nejo thought Hill could make the partnership between law enforcement and broadcasters happen because he: (1) had worked for TV and radio stations, (2) was the volunteer Emergency Management Director for his tribe, and (3) used to be the Public Safety Chief in Marshall, Oklahoma. "He said 'tag you're it,'" said Hill.

Hill is also one-quarter Lenape, also known as the Delaware Tribe in Northeast Oklahoma. He received considerable guidance through the training from Fox Valley Technical College, but he said the biggest obstacle in developing an AMBER Alert program was overcoming cultural issues.

Tribal leaders and the community needed to be educated on how the AMBER Alert program would be something positive. "Indians tend to be standoffish and don't want to draw attention to themselves. Sometimes it will take 12 to 14 hours

before they notify police that a child is missing," said Hill. "We are dealing with culture."

The Gila River Indian Community is just south of Phoenix, with about 20,000 people living in the 725-square-mile reservation. Gila River is also one of the 10 pilot sites to bring AMBER Alerts into Indian Country. Hill used the money from the pilot program for technological improvements, including a computer aided dispatch and records management system.

It took 2 years, but the Gila River Tribal Council approved the AMBER Alert Plan unanimously. During that time, Hill learned about the strengths of the community when a 3-year-old and a 5-year-old went missing. "We found them," said Hill. "But the thing that amazed me is the number of people who came from all over, including some on horseback."

Hill said the interstate freeway that runs through the community makes children on the reservation especially vulnerable. Plus, the Mexican border is only 90 minutes away. Hill said, "I want to get everything built up and developed and be ready to notify people to look for children in case an abduction ever happens."

Gila River is now creating a Child Abduction Response Team. Hill is also starting the community's first radio station to help improve communication and disseminate AMBER Alerts. He also hopes to create a "virtual fence" by placing a surveillance camera on every entry point in the community.

Hill's ultimate goal is to promote changes that will protect children. "I get frustrated by people who don't want to change. There are those who say 'We've never done it before,'" said Hill. "I will keep pushing, give the best I can, and sometimes it works. I will show everyone the benefits and address any of the negatives. I can't get frustrated and quit. I have to just keep moving." ☺



Mark Hill's heart has been with the AMBER Alert program ever since he started with the Gila River Police Department.



5 YEARS OF AMBER ALERT BY THE NUMBERS

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) now has a 5-year total on the number of AMBER Alerts issued. Between January 1, 2004, and December 31, 2009, 1,356 AMBER Alerts were issued for 1,689 children. NCMEC developed a protocol to collect data on AMBER Alerts beginning in 2004. Statistics prior to that year are unavailable. ☺

YEAR	ALERTS ISSUED	CHILDREN INVOLVED
2004	196	243
2005	275	338
2006	261	316
2007	227	278
2008	194	256
2009	203	258
TOTAL	1356	1689

Families, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

- Have an Endangered Missing Advisory plan in place for cases that do not meet the AMBER Alert criteria. Provide an explanation to families when an AMBER Alert is not used.
- Prepare family members for the media, and help them keep the child's case in the public eye.
- Use care when notifying family members when a child has been recovered.
- Educate prosecutors, judges, and victim's advocates on the AMBER Alert so they can understand the issues of a victim and their family.

Family members have also been working to create a linear model that breaks down each child abduction case to 19 components. The model will be used to train law enforcement in the future.

Deputy Assistant Attorney General Mary Lou Leary thanked the family members for sharing their experiences during the roundtable. "What I learned during that time is that I can never really know how people feel," said Leary. "I can only tell you that I respect your feelings and your courage for this noble purpose." ☺



Deputy Assistant Attorney General Mary Lou Leary

NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM FOCUSES ON PROTECTING CHILDREN IN INDIAN COUNTRY

Tribal representatives from across the United States joined federal, state, and local leaders in Santa Ana Pueblo, New Mexico, on March 9-11 for the first National Symposium on Child Protection in Indian Country. The symposium included breakout sessions that specifically targeted the unique challenges in Indian Country, including:

- Runaway and at-risk children
- Online exploitation of children
- Indian Country Child Protection Teams

- New tribal community approaches to addressing child abuse
- Substance abuse and related crimes against children

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention sponsored and funded the symposium. Organizers invited tribal leaders, law enforcement representatives, and child protection professionals to create a multi-agency approach to protect Native American children from victimization and exploitation. ☺



Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Larry Echo Hawk, and Gena Tyner-Dawson, Senior Advisor to the Assistant Attorney General for Tribal Affairs addressed the National Symposium on Child Protection in Indian Country

WORKSHOP TACKLES TRIBAL AND BORDER ISSUES

On January 25-26, a Tribal and Southern Border Initiative Workshop was held in San Diego to examine ways to keep tribal and national borders from becoming barriers to recovering abducted children. Representatives from tribal, Mexican,

and California border communities attended the workshop. Participants discussed the importance of call taking, the initial response to a child abduction, and the creation of community-based Child Abduction Response Teams. ☺



Attorney General of Baja California Rommel Moreno Manjarrez addressed the workshop, stressing the importance of the AMBER Alert program in Mexico

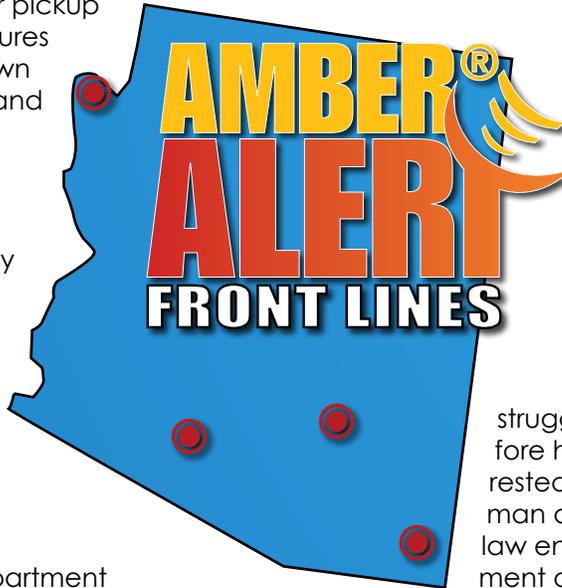
ARIZONA AMBER ALERT PRODUCES "CHRISTMAS MIRACLE"

A 5-year-old girl was outside playing with her 7- and 9-year-old sisters in front of their apartment in Phoenix on Christmas afternoon. A man drove up in a brown Ford Ranger pickup and started taking pictures of them. He pulled down the 5-year-old's pants and then threw her into his truck.

The girl was crying and the suspect drove away so fast he hit a parked vehicle while trying to get away. Several witnesses heard the crash and described the vehicle and part of the license plate to police.

The Phoenix Police Department handles as many as 10,000 missing person cases a year, but Sergeant Bryan Chapman knew this was different. "A stranger abduction is very rare, and we got the ball rolling as quickly as possible," said Chapman. An AMBER Alert was issued at 5:11 p.m.

Every on-call detective from every division was called in and patrol officers joined in the search. "I heard someone say they saw a uniformed officer on every corner," said Chapman. "It's amazing the kind of response you get when a child is abducted."



But Chapman was getting worried. Minutes were ticking by and few leads were coming in. "My heart and my concern was for this little girl," he said. "There's an immense amount of responsibility to make sure all of the pieces fall together. It became a real struggle to remain positive."

Five hours after the alert went out, K-9 Officer Mike Burns spotted the suspect's truck but he would not pull over. "I've got a brown Ford Ranger pickup

with a male and possibly a small child in the front refusing to yield," said Officer Burns on his police radio.

Burns began a high speed chase of the suspect and started broadcasting his every move on the police radio. "He's coming right past you. Don't turn in front of me... speed's about 70 miles per hour."

Police finally caught 45-year-old Larry Jon Ladwig after he ran over some spike strips and crashed his truck. Ladwig fled on foot, and punched an officer during a brief

struggle before he was arrested. Chapman and every law enforcement officer in the area were listening to the police radio. "We're screaming 'Where's the girl?' We finally settled down after we heard the girl was in the truck, and she was alive. It was the best gift anyone could have on Christmas."

Chapman was surprised the suspect was still in the area and in the same vehicle. He believes Ladwig removed the license plate from the truck because the plate number had been included in the AMBER Alert. Ladwig was charged with numerous crimes including aggravated assault, kidnapping, and molestation of a child. He had been on parole after being released from prison in July.

Chapman sits on the Arizona AMBER Alert Oversight Committee, and he said he learned a lot from this AMBER Alert. He is streamlining the protocol so the alerts will go out more quickly.

"We are big fans of the AMBER Alert," noted Chapman. "We want it to work smoother, better, and be more understandable."



Suspect Larry Jon Ladwig, 45



Sergeant Bryan Chapman, Phoenix Police Department

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AMBER ALERT SIGNS MAY BE USED FOR HIGHWAY ADVERTISING

The first state to place AMBER Alerts on electronic highway signs may be the first to also use the signs for advertising. California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has proposed an experimental plan that would show ads on the state's 708 electronic signs. Supporters of the idea say it could bring the state \$20 billion over the next 20 years. However, the U.S. Department of Transportation would have to approve the plan. ☺

LOS ANGELES POLICE USE "TWITTER-LIKE" TOOL TO SEND AMBER ALERTS

The Los Angeles Police Department is now using a new mass communication system called Nixle to notify the public about AMBER Alerts and other emergencies via text message or e-mail. Police Chief Charlie Beck said it is similar to "a professional-grade Twitter." Nixle can send information and photos but the public must register to receive the alerts. ☺

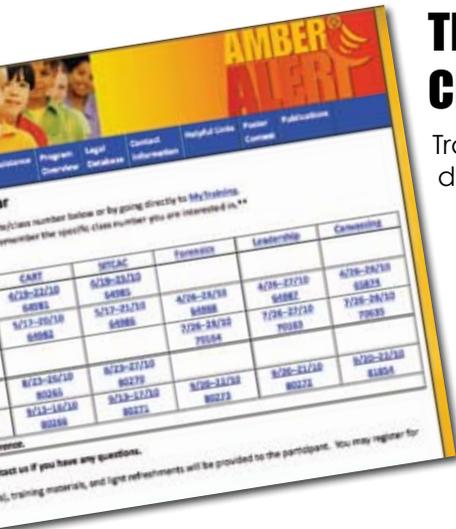


ARIZONA CONSIDERS LAW TO BAN COVERING UP LICENSE PLATES

Arizona legislators are proposing a law that would make it illegal to obscure your license plate. Lawmakers say a law is needed because people have been putting reflective plastic film over their license plates to avoid photo radar, but the covers could also interfere with finding a child after an AMBER Alert. ☺

NORTH CAROLINA WOMAN FACES PRISON FOR FALSE AMBER ALERT

A North Carolina woman pleaded guilty to federal charges for telling police her 3-year-old son had disappeared from a flea market. Police issued an AMBER Alert, and FBI agents were called in after Rosnah Hassan Thomason made the report. She later admitted the boy was really her nephew and that she put him on a plane to Japan with her brother. Thomason, set to be sentenced May 17, faces up to 5 years in prison and a fine of as much as \$250,000. ☺



TRAINING IS AVAILABLE TO HELP RECOVER ABDUCTED CHILDREN

Training opportunities on the latest methods to recover missing and abducted children are available. The following classes are being offered in 2010:

- Basic Forensic Response to Missing and Abducted Children
- Convassing, Search, and Recovery Strategies for Abducted Children
- Child Abduction Response Team (CART)
- Investigative Strategies for Missing and Abducted Children (ISMAC)
- Leadership for Missing and Abducted Children (LMAC)
- Specialized Investigative Techniques in Child Abduction Cases (SITCAC)

More information is available at www.amber-net.org/training or you can send questions to askamber@fvtc.edu. ☺