

THE AMBER ADVOCATE

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The AMBER Alert Program is a voluntary partnership between law-enforcement, media, transportation and others to send bulletins about child-abduction cases. Visit your state AMBER Alert page for alerts in your area. Info at www.AMBERalert.gov

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What's on your mind?



The AMBER Advocate

OMG...Can you believe it? AMBER Alerts are now on facebook. Check it out:

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On January 12, 2011, AMBER Alert, the most effective tool to save abducted children, teamed up with Facebook, the most successful social network in history...

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Que bueno! Alerta AMBER México is on its way...

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Mexico is now fully committed to the AMBER Alert Program. Top Mexican law enforcement and government officials announced on April 28 in Mexico City that a national protocol ... [more](#)

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Former Iowa AMBER Alert Coordinator Todd Misel helped set up the statewide child abduction alert system in 2003 ... [more](#)

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Your story ideas and pictures are welcome.

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Mexico Launches Nationwide AMBER Alert Initiative

Mexico is now fully committed to the AMBER Alert Program. Top Mexican law enforcement and government officials announced on April 28 in Mexico City that a national protocol and implementation of "Alerta AMBER" for the entire country.

The Attorney General's Office will oversee Mexico's AMBER Alert Program with support from the Public Safety Ministry and the National Registry of Missing Persons. The plan will create a network between law enforcement, government officials, and the media to immediately notify the public when a child has been abducted.

"It is necessary to establish coordination, maximize the use of technology, and provide training to those responsible for operating the AMBER Alert in each of the states," said Francisco Blake Mora, Mexico's Secretary of the Interior.

The Mexican House of Representatives is already considering legislation to strengthen and expand the AMBER Alert Program. Rep. Arturo Zamora Jiménez presented an amendment to make the program part of the Mexican legal code.

"This is an act of utmost importance to protect the interests of minors," said Rep. Zamora Jiménez. "We need to commit our country to protecting the rights of children and adolescents and stopping crimes involving Mexican children."

In 2006, the U.S. Department of Justice began the Southern Border Initiative to extend the AMBER Alert Program into Mexico. Baja California launched the first AMBER Alert Program in Mexico in 2009. Tamaulipas, Nuevo Léon, and Sonora are also developing AMBER Alert programs, and Chihuahua has a child abduction alert plan that uses a different name.

OJJDP Program Manager Cecilia Duquela has worked with Fox Valley Technical College for the past 5 years to make this dream a reality. "Obviously, I'm very proud and excited about this partnership with Mexico to rescue children and bring them home," said Duquela.

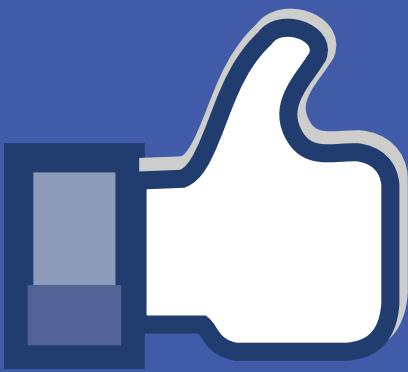
She said federal law enforcement agencies and state attorneys general offices were on board

since the beginning. "The best way to describe it is engaged," she said. "They are committed to bringing AMBER Alerts into their states."

Mexico plans to have a fully operational nationwide AMBER Alert Program by early 2012.

According to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, nearly 400 American children have been recovered in Mexico. "Obviously, you want to make all the resources and tools available to keep all children safe, but this will bring more U.S. children home," added Duquela. ☺





social justice: amber alert partners with facebook

On January 12, 2011, AMBER Alert, the most effective tool to save abducted children, teamed up with Facebook, the most successful social network in history, to save abducted children. AMBER Alert suddenly has lots of new friends. Facebook has begun posting AMBER Alerts that more than 750 million users worldwide—more than 130 million of them in the United States—can view.

Facebook worked with the Department of Justice and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) to create a main AMBER Alert page and 53 additional pages for the 50 states, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the District of Columbia.

“AMBER Alerts depend on partnerships between public and private entities to get the word out when a child goes missing,” said Laurie O. Robinson, Assistant Attorney General of the Office of Justice Programs and National AMBER Alert Coordinator. “Social networking has few boundaries, and now AMBER Alerts will benefit from that nearly limitless reach.”

NCMEC posts the initial alerts, updates, and cancellations for each geographical area. Facebook users can sign up to receive the alerts in their area by simply becoming a friend. Those friends can then post the alerts and send them to others.

“We know time is the enemy in the search for abducted children, and people on Facebook will allow the alerts to become viral, not just in local jurisdictions, but across the country and around the world,” said Ernie Allen, NCMEC President and CEO. “It is free, and it is going to save lives.”

The AMBER Alert sites do not contain any advertising, and Facebook users cannot post comments on the state pages. This plan will ensure that the only information about the AMBER Alert will come from the law enforcement agency that issued the alert. Once the alert is canceled, Facebook removes the post from all sites so users will not search for a child who has already been found.

Facebook also donated more than 25 million advertising impressions to promote the AMBER Alert pages. Just 5 months after the launch, the

What's on the National AMBER Alert facebook page...

- **Links to state AMBER pages**
- **Current AMBER Alert news**
- **AMBER Advocate Editions**
- **Hundreds of millions of potential people who can help find a missing child**

What's on the State AMBER Alert facebook pages...

- **Current active AMBER Alerts automatically issued by NCMEC**
- **A local network of concerned citizens eager to help in the recovery of a child**

main AMBER Alert page has over 60,000 friends and nearly 500,000 people view the site each week. The vast majority of the people using the site are from the United States, but it has attracted friends from 18 other countries as far away as India, Turkey, and Malaysia.

“Facebook is more than a social network, it is



Like AMBER Alert on Facebook
by going to facebook.com/AMBERalert

one of the largest communication platforms," said Chris Sonderby, Facebook Lead Security and Investigations Counsel. "The more people who participate, the better. It is a small step that can make a big difference in the life of a child."

The main page has a link to each of the state pages and has become a community bulletin board for the AMBER Alert Program and efforts to find abducted children. Within minutes after a new post goes up on the main AMBER Alert page, tens of thousands of people can view the site and post comments. Here is a sampling of some of the comments made shortly after the launch:

AMBER Alert and 49,056 others like this.

"It will be amazing what Facebook can do for AMBER Alert. It is national and fast and gives more info than just people and vehicles. We will be asking 'Why did we take so long?'"

"It is the best example of how the Internet can be a useful tool."

"This is right on time. AMERICA unite; find these missing children!!!"

"My heart breaks and my stomach gets knots every time I hear an AMBER Alert. However, when a child is located and saved, the joy is AMAZING! What a great tool to help protect our children and unite us in the fight."

"I cannot wait to start hearing the success stories of children being found through Facebook!"

story picked up national attention. Five days later, a woman recognized the victim from a television story, and the girl was recovered safely in San Francisco.

"We would have not had as many leads without our Facebook fans," said Flaherty. "Social media enabled law enforcement to reach beyond our borders to find this 12-year-old girl. Her search started with an AMBER Alert and spread because of social media and traditional media. I can only imagine or dream what we can do now."

On January 15, Facebook posted its first AMBER Alert for a 13-year-old Columbus, Missouri, girl. More than 63,000 people viewed the original post, and the girl was found the following day in Jasper, Alabama.

Julie Fisher believes Facebook has the potential to save many children. The Massachusetts mother regularly posts updates on AMBER Alerts across the country. She also encourages others to sign up for the alerts in their own states.

"I just want this to be a safer world for everyone, especially children," said Fisher. "Facebook is a great way to spread the alerts because even if you are not in the area of the alert, a friend, or a friend of a friend may cross their path. What better use of networking is there? Someone may be in the right place at the right time and save a life."



AMBER Alert Facebook page

Col. Steven Flaherty, Virginia State Police Superintendent, spoke at the Facebook/AMBER Alert launch on how his state has already used the social network to find an abducted child. On December 6, 2010, the Roanoke (Virginia) Police Department issued an AMBER Alert for a 12-year-old girl who had been abducted after her mother was murdered. The alert was posted on the Virginia State Police Facebook page, and the

Front Lines In Indian Country: tribal, local, and federal officers team up to save a child

It was nearly midnight when officers broke down the hotel room door at the Route 66 Casino and Hotel. Inside, they found 3-year-old Ismyella Rodriguez, her alleged abductor, and four other adults. Ismyella was safe, and no one was injured during the dramatic rescue that ended 10 hours after a violent abduction, an AMBER Alert, and the mobilization of federal, local, and tribal law enforcement officers.

On April 6, 24-year-old Mario Rodriguez allegedly kicked in the door of an apartment in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and snatched Ismyella after pushing her babysitter off a second story balcony.

The Albuquerque Police Department set up a command post with phone banks and issued an AMBER Alert. Sgt. Louis Heckroth and other members of the Repeat Offender Project were called in to track the suspect.

"When they did the AMBER Alert activation, all the phones were set up and ready to go," said Heckroth.

FBI Special Agents Marcus McCaskill and Ben Bourgeois heard about the abduction on police scanners and quickly headed to the command post to offer assistance and access to their databases for all the tips coming in.

"Once we got everyone in the same room, our efficiency went through the roof," said Bourgeois.

"We were also getting a lot of calls on the tip line because of the AMBER Alert," added McCaskill.

An out-of-state family member heard about the AMBER Alert and provided enough information to support a police search for the suspect at the Pueblo of Laguna reservation. Albuquerque police officers and FBI agents knew the Pueblo of Laguna Police Department would be critical to saving the child.

"You hear all the horror stories between tribal police and law enforcement agencies, and it has not happened here," said Pueblo of Laguna Police Chief Michelle Ray. "We all work really well together. We have a common goal, and everything seems to fall in place."

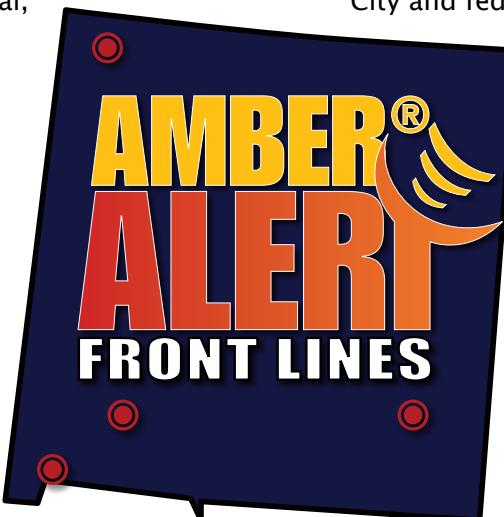
City and federal law enforcement officers traveled in the same vehicles and met with the tribal police at the Route 66 Casino and Hotel. Tribal investigators had worked with casino employees previously, and those relationships helped eliminate the red tape so police could quickly pinpoint where the suspect might be hiding with the

victim.

"I had the tribal police and FBI with us, so once the investigation led to a specific hotel room, I could authorize a hostage rescue," said Heckroth.

The rescue went off without a hitch, and the victim's family was overjoyed the girl was safe. "It was like the Super Bowl! Woo-hoo! Just jumping, like oh-my-gosh!" family friend Loretta Ortega told reporters.

Investigators said it would have been very hard to catch up with the suspects if they kept on driving. They believe the AMBER Alert scared the suspects into hunkering down in a hotel room so they would not risk being caught on the road.



ABOVE: Mario Rodriguez, 24

BETWEEN: Ismyella Rodriguez, 3



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PROFILE: Sam Allen Fills Texas-Sized Job As State Coordinator

Texas is where the AMBER Alert began, but Sam Allen was entering uncharted territory when he was hired to become the state's first statewide AMBER Alert Coordinator in 2004. As one of the nation's few, "full-time" AMBER Alert coordinators, Allen relied on his 15 years of experience at the Texas Department of Public Safety to make this new job work.

"You walk in and figure it out as you go," said Allen. "This has been the most challenging and the most rewarding job I have ever had."

To begin, he developed an accredited statewide training program for law enforcement personnel. The program has grown exponentially along the way. From September 2008 to August 2010, Allen instructed 76 courses for 3,397 people. Another 3,745 people were trained through the department's online program.

"With 254 counties in Texas, having an online training resource is one of the smartest decisions we have ever made," said Allen. "Considering the staffing and economic challenges most law enforcement agencies face today, it is difficult to send personnel out-of-town for training."

Allen also put together an AMBER Alert Steering Committee and an After-Action Review Board to troubleshoot the state's network and promote effective alert coordination. Media, transportation, and law enforcement representatives work as partners to combat child abductions. "Listen and learn from your partners," he said. "Communication is everything. Keep an open mind, and be ready to accept and make changes."

In addition to the state's AMBER Alert network, Texas has 18 independent regional programs that issue their own AMBER Alerts. Regional programs include multiple counties, spanning large geographical areas of the state. "We have regional programs with population centers larger than some U.S. states," said Allen. Several regional programs in Texas incorporate counties of adjoining states, and one program includes areas in Mexico.

Each year, Allen organizes a 2-day summit for all regional AMBER Alert Coordinators. "I am like the phone company. I am here to connect people," Allen said. "Knowledge is the way to fight the battle, so we are not desensitizing the public to AMBER Alerts."

The coordinators plan the itinerary, which ensures the discussions are relevant and engaging. "If you are a new coordinator, you are going to need all the help you can get," said Allen. "The networking and information gives new and seasoned coordinators a friend or two to call upon during future AMBER Alerts."

During the past 7 years, Allen has also kept up with the Texas legislature. State lawmakers have tweaked the AMBER Alert program, added a Silver Alert for missing senior citizens, along with a Blue Alert for suspects who have seriously injured or killed a law enforcement officer. Legislators are now considering another alert for people with intellectual disabilities.



Texas Statewide AMBER Alert Coordinator Sam Allen



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Hacked: Lessons From The Attack On The Iowa AMBER Alert System



Former Iowa AMBER Alert Coordinator Todd Misel helped set up the statewide child abduction alert system in 2003. He has been involved with every AMBER Alert in the state or been given a heads up an alert was about to go out. At least that was the case until 8:18 a.m., November 27, 2010, when he and everyone who had signed up for Iowa AMBER Alerts by e-mail received this message: "The AMBER Alert status has been set to IN PROGRESS!"

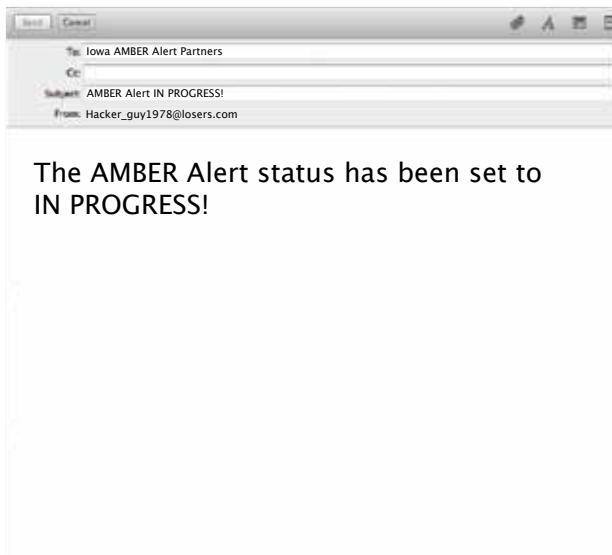
"I got the e-mail message, and no one had contacted me. I thought, 'What's up with that?'" said Misel, who is also a Captain with the Iowa Department of Public Safety's State Patrol Division.

The message directed recipients to a Website that still had information on a February AMBER Alert for a teenage girl that had been cancelled because she had been safely recovered.

It was the first time a hacker had broken into the newly automated Iowa AMBER Alert Plan Website. It also may have been the first time in the nation that a hacker issued an AMBER Alert. Five minutes later, Misel received another e-mail that the hacker also apparently sent: "The AMBER Alert has ended."

Iowa's notification system was set up nearly 4 years ago; Iowa uses the original National Crime Information Center (NCIC) missing child entry as

the trigger for its AMBER Plan. AMBER Alert information entered into the IOWA system/NCIC automatically posts to the Iowa Website and triggers e-mail notifications to thousands of people who registered to receive the alerts. The system was automated to avoid human error, but the Website proved to be vulnerable to someone intent on hacking into the system.



"We were embarrassed," said Misel. "It is like having someone break into your home. You feel violated, not only as an individual, but for the sanctity of the AMBER Alert system."

The good news is the AMBER Alert did not go out through the other means of notification. The Emergency Alert System was not activated, highway signs did not post the alerts, and the Iowa Lottery did not issue lottery tickets with the alerts. The media reported on the breach but did not broadcast an AMBER Alert.

Two days later, the Iowa Department of Public Safety launched a criminal investigation to find the hacker and solicited help from the FBI and the Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force. ICAC investigators were involved because of their computer investigative skills and the crime directly affected the safety of Iowa children.

Iowa's AMBER Alert partners also went back to find out what went wrong with the Website and

take steps to ensure it would not happen again. The Iowa Department of Public Safety and the Iowa Department of Administrative Services Information Technology Enterprise, which oversees the Website, quickly instituted new safety measures to prevent another breach. They also put together a list of lessons learned for others with automated AMBER Alert plans:

- Document training and practice the AMBER Alert notification procedure.
- Develop a backup plan so the AMBER Alert will go out even if the Website is down.
- Clarify ownership and responsibilities of the Website application with the service provider through a Service Level Agreement.
- Have a process in place to build security into the Website application from the beginning to end.
- Scan the application and review the source code prior to deployment and during production.



Former Iowa AMBER Alert Coordinator **Todd Misel**

- Develop and implement regular monthly or quarterly security scans of the application.
- Have a communications plan in place. One spokesperson should be available to speak with the media and all state agencies and partners.
- Have a script prepared for individuals who the media may contact that directs them to the single point of contact.
- Hold a daily internal briefing or conference call to discuss any issues so you can control the message and keep information consistent.

"Automation of the AMBER Alert Website is great, but make sure there are checks and balances in place," added Misel. "There is an expectation from the public that you will be able to continue AMBER Alert operations, even when your internal systems are compromised."

Front Lines, Continued from page 6

Everyone involved in the child abduction investigation said some valuable lessons were learned from this AMBER Alert:

- "Our AMBER Alert training helped," said Ray. "It was great to hear how all the agencies worked together to get the child home safely."
- "Everyone knew what their role was, which is important in this type of investigation," said Heckroth. "You need to know what to do in advance. If you wait until the day it happens, you can put lives in danger."
- "The AMBER Alert worked exactly the way it was supposed to work," said Bourgeouis. "You get everyone up and running quicker with an AMBER Alert than any other way," added Mc-Caskill.

Mario Rodriguez faces kidnapping charges and three other adults have been charged in connection with the abduction. Ismyella Rodriguez is now living with relatives. ↳



Pueblo of Laguna Police Chief **Michelle Ray**, Sgt. **Ray Jose** and Criminal Investigator **Frances Flores**

AMBER Alert In Indian Country



Tribes Celebrate Missing Children's Day

Five tribes gathered at the Ak-Chin Indian Reservation in Arizona to celebrate National Missing Children's Day on May 25. More than 65 people, including federal, county, and municipal law enforcement officers participated in the celebration and a 2-day investigative training session. The Ak-Chin Tribe produced and showed a child abduction video, and the tribe's youth council demonstrated dancing and constructed small adobe huts and native grass shelters for table centerpieces. ↗



Online Discussion Held On Missing Indian Children

The Office for Victims of Crime held an online forum on May 10 on the best practices for responding to missing children in Indian Country to commemorate National Missing Children's Day. The discussion included **Nadja Jones**, the Senior Community Development Specialist for the National Indian Child Welfare Association. She also oversees several grants for training tribal members. ↗



Grants Will Bring Faster Internet Service To Indian Country

U.S. Commerce Secretary **Gary Locke** announced on March 25 that his agency will award \$63 million in grants to increase broadband access in tribal and rural areas. The grants include:

- \$13.8 million to the Navajo Tribe to bring high-speed broadband service to 15,000 square miles in Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah.
- \$2.4 million to build a broadband infrastructure to connect 42 emergency response agencies, healthcare facilities, libraries, and government offices for the Nez Perce Tribe in Idaho. ↗

Profile, Continued from page 7

Allen keeps statistics on all of the alerts. The numbers for statewide alerts as of June 1, 2011 include the following:

- 68 AMBER Alerts involving the safe recovery of 75 children (beginning August 2002).
- 2 Blue Alerts involving the location of one suspect (beginning August 2008).
- 226 Silver Alerts involving the safe recovery of 212 senior citizens (beginning September 2007).

"I track everything," said Allen. "I want to know how many were on foot and how many were in a vehicle. Statistics are vital toward making informed decisions."

When he has spare time, Allen likes to bowl, watch movies, and play video and board games. "I'm a big geek," said Allen. "However, I have made this job a priority because Texas citizens expect my best when it comes to the safety of their families and loved ones."

"I like working with people who are making a difference to save lives," he added. "I want to fight for those who can't fight for themselves." ↗

AMBER Alert International



Romania Starts Child Abduction Alert Plan

On May 20, Romania launched a child abduction alert system, called "Alerta Rapire Copil," to disseminate alerts to the public through the media and at train stations and other public transport centers. Law enforcement will only activate the alerts if there is clear evidence a child has been abducted or his or her life is in danger.

Police and prosecutors took part in three training sessions in March and April in preparation for the alert launch. Law enforcement representatives learned about the U.S. AMBER Alert Program, how to work with the media, and how

to make the decision to issue an alert. Representatives from France, England, and the International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children also took part in the training.



A public information campaign about the alert began April 18 to build awareness and to show how the public can help find an abducted child. The Romanian Center for Missing and Sexually Exploited Children and the

Romanian police and prosecutor's office developed the alert system during the past year. ↗

AMBER Alert Continues To Expand Globally

CHILD ABDUCTION ALERT LAUNCHED IN AUSTRALIA

The Queensland (Australia) Police started the Child Abduction Alert system to notify the public about suspected child abductions. The program began December 29, 2010, and initially involved only radio stations, but will be expanded to include television, taxi companies, buses, lotto agents, and transportation. The alert uses the same criteria as the U.S. AMBER Alert plan.



MALAYSIA BEGINS ALERT SYSTEM FOR MISSING CHILDREN

The abduction and murder of an 8-year-old girl 4 years ago prompted Malaysia to create the NUR (Nationwide Urgent Response) Alert for missing children. The plan began in January and is patterned after the U.S. AMBER Alert system. The alerts will be distributed to broadcasters, government agencies, banks, hotels, and transportation agencies within 24 hours after a child younger than 12 years old has been reported missing.



SAIPAN TO START AMBER ALERT PROGRAM

The western Pacific island of Saipan will soon have an AMBER Alert program. Saipan is the largest of 15 islands that are part of the U.S. Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. [Gov. Benigno R. Fital](#) announced the plan on May 31, 6 days after two sisters, ages 9 and 10, were reported missing.



BELGIUM STARTS CHILD ALERT PLAN

Belgium launched the Child Alert system in February for children who have disappeared and are in a life-threatening situation. The alerts will go to road signs, radio and television stations, mobile telephone providers, Internet service providers, electronic billboards, and company networks. The alerts will remain active for 6 hours but can be renewed to be active for as long as 24 hours. Belgium became the focus of international attention after a 3-year-old British girl went missing in 2007. The parents of Madeleine McCann immediately called for Belgium and all European countries to start a system similar to the U.S. AMBER Alert program.



Switzerland Now Using Text Messages For Child Abduction Alerts

Swiss police began using text messages in February to notify the public when a child has been abducted. Individuals must sign up to receive the alerts on their phones. Switzerland started a nationwide child abduction alert system in January 2010.



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The AMBER Alert Program is a voluntary partnership between law-enforcement, media, transportation and others to send bulletins about child-abduction cases. Visit your state AMBER Alert page for alerts in your area. Info at www.AMBERalert.gov

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What's on your mind?

**Virginia Using Lottery For AMBER Alerts**

A citizen suggestion led Virginia to employ lottery ticket terminals for AMBER Alerts. More than 5,000 clerk-operated terminals and 700 self service machines will scroll AMBER Alert messages. The terminals will not display jackpot amounts and marketing messages when an alert has been activated.

**Internet Advertiser Will Post AMBER Alerts**

A national online advertising company has partnered with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) to place AMBER Alerts on Internet banner ads. Dotomi, Inc., said the alerts will only interrupt online banner advertising in the area where a child has been abducted. "I would like to thank NCMEC and Dotomi for working together to develop another way for the public to help us identify missing and abducted children and bring them home safely," said Laurie O. Robinson, Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Justice Programs, Department of Justice. Individuals can click on the ads to get additional details about the abduction, including where to report information to law enforcement.

**Texas Golfers Tee Up To Raise Money For AMBER Alert**

More than 100 golfers raised \$44,205 for the Texas Center for the Missing and the Houston Regional AMBER Alert System. The May 5 tournament was sponsored by the Wildcat Golf Club and emceed by a local television personality. The Texas Center for the Missing receives no government funding and is supported by private donations.

**AMBER Alert Application Helps Catch Alleged Child Abductor**

April 11, 2011, Federal Way, Washington. Police issued an AMBER Alert after an 8-year-old girl disappeared from a playground shortly after a man in his twenties was seen taking pictures of children at the playground. A short while later, a department store clerk noticed a man, who was buying clothes for a young girl, was acting strangely. The employee checked her iPhone AMBER Alert application and saw the man and child matched the description in the AMBER Alert. Store personnel called the police, who arrested Benjamin Trinh, 28, of Tacoma, Washington, and charged him with kidnapping. The child returned home on her own as a result of the evidence gathered from that tip.

AMBER Alert comments and letters.



Lieutenant Chuck Fleeger – College Station (Texas) Police Department Just completed the online Patrol First Response for Missing and Abducted Children and thought it was great! You guys continue to do a wonderful job, and your work is very appreciated.



Susan WhiteHorse, Manager – Wisconsin AMBER Alert and Missing & Exploited Children & Adults I sincerely want to thank all of you for your rapid response posting Wisconsin's page on Facebook. All your effort is greatly appreciated. Facebook will be instrumental in bringing children home safely.

amber-net.org | askamber@fvtc.edu

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