

THE AMBER ADVOCATE

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MANY FIRSTS AT 2008 NATIONAL AMBER ALERT CONFERENCE

Many firsts were noted by AMBER Alert partners at the 2008 National AMBER Alert Conference in Orange County, California. It was the first conference to include members of Child Abduction Response Team (CART) representatives, first to involve European AMBER Alert partners and some broadcasters said it was the first conference to fully recognize and incorporate the important role of the media.

The conference was also the first and last opportunity to hear from Assistant Attorney General for the Department of Justice's (DOJ) Office of Justice Programs (OJP)

down each year. Here is the breakdown:

- 2005 275 activations
- 2006 261 activations
- 2007 227 activations

Projections for 2008 indicate there will be less than 200 activations. "We are trying to identify trends," said Bob Hoever, Associate Director of Training and Outreach for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. "I think part of it is there is much better training. We are miles ahead of when we met at the first AMBER Alert Conference in 2002."

However, secondary notifications have increased from 49 percent in 2005 to 85 percent in 2008. "When you get a text message sent directly to you saying that a child has been abducted, you take it seri-

ously," Sedgwick said. "Suddenly, it is personal." However, some secondary notifications do not go out because the child has already been recovered.

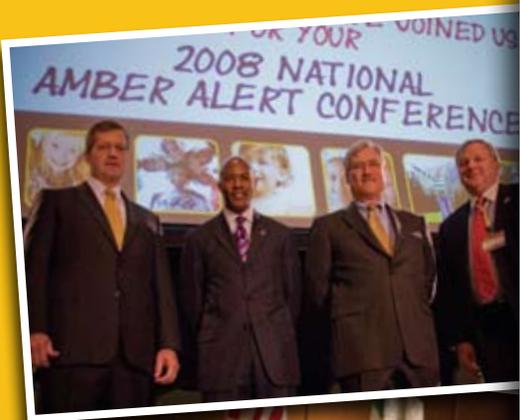
Presenters noted that AMBER Alert plans should constantly be refined and training must be ongoing. "There is no finish line," said Knoxville Deputy Chief of Police Gus Paidousis. "You may be cutting edge today but not be cutting edge tomorrow." He stressed that telecommunications need practice in the area of testing and scenarios for AMBER Alerts. Volunteer coordinators also need to be prepared for all of the people who will show up to help. "It doesn't matter if you want volunteers, they are going to show up," said Paidousis.

The role of transportation also continues to be important for

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and National AMBER Alert Coordinator Jeffrey L. Sedgwick. "We have a strong foundation, thanks to the selfless work of broadcasters, transportation officials and law enforcement," said Sedgwick. "But we have to maintain our level of vigilance. We don't have the luxury of letting our guard down."

Several training sessions focused on incorporating the CART concept into each AMBER Alert plan. More than 160 teams of law enforcement officers, forensic experts, victim service providers and others have been trained since DOJ launched the CART initiative in November 2005. "There's no time for turf wars," added Sedgwick. "What is needed is the full crush of resources and expertise so that the child can be recovered as swiftly as possible." Surprisingly, the number of AMBER Alert activations are actually going



AMBER Alerts. The Department of Justice developed a "Best Practices Guide" in 2005 and transportation officials were urged to update their practices, policies and messages. One presenter noted more does not always mean better and people can be desensitized to AMBER Alerts if they are not timely or displayed in an area where people can help. "Despite all the technology, it is still a very human decision made by law enforcement officers across the country," said Dale Bonner, Secretary of the California Business, Transportation and Housing Agency.

One panel considered what would have happened if an AMBER Alert

FORGING STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN BROADCASTERS & LAW ENFORCEMENT

With a common goal of finding an abducted child, the 2008 National AMBER Alert Conference addressed ways to forge stronger partnerships between two different, yet vitally important professions, law enforcement and broadcasters.

University of South Carolina Journalism Professor Hugh Munn moderated a spirited discussion between broadcasters and law enforcement about the Elizabeth Shoaf abduction. A national news

magazine did a critical story about the decision to not issue an AMBER Alert. Kershaw County, South Carolina Sheriff Steve McCaskill said his department did everything possible to investigate the case and notify the public. "What would an AMBER Alert do? Absolutely nothing," he said. "We could end up issuing an AMBER Alert for everything."

The broadcasters who reviewed the case agreed. "There is nothing that could have been done differently,"

plan was in place when Amber Hagerman was abducted in 1996. The panelists were unsure if the alert would have saved her life, but were certain the media and the public would have received the information about her abduction much quicker.

"We have a lot of missing children," noted Ron Laney, Associate Administrator for Child Protection Division, OJJDP. "We need to keep in touch with each other. I know we are doing a lot but we are not there yet. When we are working together there is nothing that we cannot do." ☺

said Oregon Association of Broadcasters President Bill Johnstone. He added that more needs to be done to educate the public about the AMBER Alert criteria. Jacksonville, Florida News Director Mike Garber said his reporters did several stories on the criteria.

"Do you think the public finally got it?" he asked. "I still don't."

Conflict also occurred when Destiny Norton was abducted in Salt Lake City in 2006. Utah AMBER Alert Coordinator Paul Murphy presented a case study

about how some media members pressured the police to end the AMBER Alert after a person of interest turned himself in. Murphy stated that reporters continued to provide excellent coverage of Destiny's disappearance but noted the lead detective still regrets cancelling the alert. Sadly, the body of the 5-year-old girl was later found in a neighbor's basement. After two after-action reviews of the case, broadcasters and law enforcement were able to work out their differ-



Charles Bierbauer, University of South Carolina Dean of Mass Communications and Information Studies



OHIO BROADCASTER WINS 2008 MEDIA PERSON OF THE YEAR

Christine Merritt has always made sure Ohio broadcasters have a strong voice on how to make AMBER Alert plans work best. But the Executive Vice President of the Ohio Association of Broadcasters did not expect to be named the Broadcast/Media Person of the Year at the 2008 National AMBER Alert Conference.

"I was surprised and honored to receive the award," said Merritt. "I think it is a great recognition of the great role the state broadcaster associations play in the AMBER Alert."

Merritt was involved when local and regional AMBER Alert plans sprung up in Ohio and helped develop the statewide plan that was launched on January 1, 2003. She also helped create secondary AMBER Alert notifications in the state but she thinks broadcasters will always play a predominant role in recovering children.

"Broadcasters play a critical role in getting the word out immediately," said Merritt. "We have had abductors give up the child after hearing the message on the radio or seeing their picture on TV."

Over the years Merritt said she has been humbled and inspired by child abduction survivors to do everything she can. But she said her two small children give her the greatest incentive to do more. "I realize how precious children are and how we really need to motivate people to make sure the alerts go out."

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FLORIDA POLICE LEARN FROM MOCK CHILD ABDUCTION

The Florida Child Abduction Response Team (CART) responded to a report that a 13-year-old girl had been abducted from Tropical Park, Florida and the suspect was driving the victim to Broward County. The report was fake but the exercise on Oct. 29 was a real attempt to see how CART and local law enforcement would handle a child abduction case. Authorities said the training was a success because the "suspect" and "victim" were located.

AMBER ALERT FACT CHECK

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children is the source for AMBER Alert statistics. Coordinators should send information about 2008 alerts to Rachel Mathieu at Rmathieu@ncmec.org by the end of the year.

AMBER™ ALERT PRAISE

The Cole Puffinburger AMBER Alert has been perhaps the most difficult and challenging AMBER Alert that we have ever activated in Nevada. We want to thank California AMBER Alert Coordinator LD Maples, Bob Hoever and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children for their extraordinary cooperation. The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department has been very generous in their positive comments towards the commitment and work of southern Nevada's television and radio stations; the outdoor billboards and road signs; the state AMBER Alert web site; and the cell phone text messages.

Bob Fisher,
Nevada AMBER Alert Coordinator

PROFILE: Donna Hodges

FLORIDA COORDINATOR RECOGNIZED FOR GIVING ALL FOR AMBER ALERT

Florida AMBER Alert Coordinator Donna Hodges was enjoying her lunch with everyone else at the 2008 National AMBER Alert Conference when she received the surprise of her life. She had been named the AMBER Alert Coordinator of the year.

"I was shocked," Hodges said. "I had no idea I was going to get the award. It made me proud, but I know there are a lot of people who deserve it."

The Research and Training Specialist for the Florida Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse has experienced surprises and challenges since getting involved with AMBER Alerts. Hodges first heard about the AMBER Alert plan in Texas in 1999 and wanted to bring the plan to Florida.

"There were not too many people to contact to get background information," said Hodges. "You had to try something and if it did not work you had to try something new." Hodges persisted and she launched the nation's second statewide AMBER Alert in August 2000. "I took the ball and ran with it," said Hodges.

Florida's AMBER Alert plan started simple but Hodges makes sure she keeps up with new ideas and new technology. "I think we have our bases covered but I keep trying to reach other people," said Hodges. "Right now I don't know how we can." If anything she would like to simplify the process so all of the elements of an AMBER Alert could go out with the push of just one button.

During her career Hodges has developed a soft spot for the elderly and children because they are so vulnerable. "I just love children," she said. "I always thought we needed to look for them. It is fulfilling, and it is sad, but we do have our happy moments when we find a child."



Donna Hodges,
Florida AMBER Alert Coordinator

"Because of her commitment, the AMBER Alert program has helped to bring 52 Florida children home," said National AMBER Alert Coordinator Jeffrey L. Sedgwick while presenting the

award to Hodges. The 52 children represent victims recovered directly by the AMBER Alert, but Florida has recovered 136 children safely since the AMBER Alert plan was launched.

Hodges' work with the AMBER Alert is also motivated by her 13-year-old granddaughter who takes a keen interest in grandma's work. "I think I have her scared somewhat," said Hodges. "She is certainly more aware than someone else's child."

She offered this advice to new AMBER Alert coordinators: "Be patient. I think someone coming in new may find it intimidating. When you think about it, you are putting yourself on a time frame for the AMBER Alert to go out quickly and if you get flustered it might interfere with what you are trying to do. Remain calm, have patience and know the ins and outs of your AMBER Alert system."

Still, the veteran and now award-winning AMBER Alert coordinator said she has no intentions to rest on her laurels. "I always give 110 percent anyway and that is not going to stop." ☺

ON THE FRONT LINES: New Jersey

NEW JERSEY & OTHER STATES HANDLE AMBER ALERTS DURING CONFERENCE

Several AMBER Alert Coordinators did not get to take a break from duties during the 2008 National AMBER Alert Conference. Four states issued alerts before the conference was over.

Lt. Thomas Keyes is the Missing Persons Clearinghouse Supervisor for the New Jersey State Police.

Keyes and New Jersey AMBER Alert Coordinator Sgt. David Jones were sitting in a training session on Oct. 16 when they received a message shortly after noon, California time, that a child had been snatched from a store in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

"As soon as I heard the alert, I felt displaced," said Keyes. "You definitely do not want to be out of the loop. I followed it on my Blackberry and Sgt. Jones followed it on his laptop. We kept asking questions to double check everything but you could see it coming together."

Store surveillance video showed 3-year-old Jessica Alexandra Alvarez playing in the toy area when she was taken by a woman with long curly black hair. An updated alert went out about an hour later with pictures of the victim and a picture of the suspect from the surveillance video.

New Jersey State Police Det. Bill Tietjen was back in the Garden State making sure the alert and all updates went out properly. "This was our first AMBER Alert where we did not have a vehicle," said Tietjen. "We are pretty strict on our AMBER Alert guidelines. When we have an AMBER Alert, everyone pays attention."



A security guard at a nearby store recognized the woman from the surveillance picture and another update was sent with detailed information and a new photo of suspect Eyvonne D. Alexander. Police found the suspect and the 3-year-old girl at a gas station seven minutes after the last update and less than an hour after the AMBER Alert was initiated.

"As a parent it is a good thing to know the alert worked as good as it did," said Keyes. New Jersey had not had an AMBER Alert in 15 months but a test was done in August to make sure everything worked.

"It had a positive end," added Tietjen. "The community came together and assisted by looking at the photos and finding the child." ☺

ARIZONA STARTS ENDANGERED PERSON ALERT

Arizona Attorney General Terry Goddard launched the Endangered Person Alert on Oct. 22, 2008 to help find missing persons who do not meet the AMBER Alert criteria. The statewide alert system was created as a partnership between law enforcement, broadcasters and senior advocacy groups. The plan notifies law enforcement and media but does not activate freeway signs. ☺

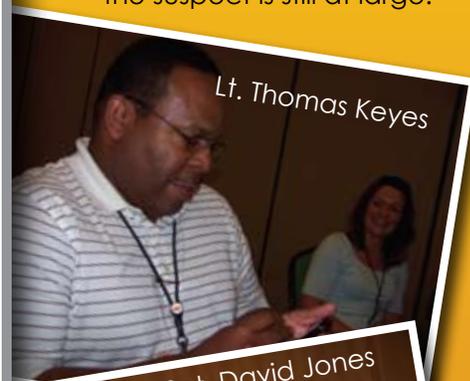
OTHER CONFERENCE AMBER ALERTS

October 15, 2008

- Nevada issued an alert for a 6-year-old boy who was abducted by two men posing as police officers. The victim was found safe four days later walking on a darkened street in Las Vegas

October 16, 2008

- Michigan issued an alert for a 15-year-old girl after she went missing from her high school. The girl and her boyfriend were found by police two hours later.
- California issued an alert after a man allegedly beat and abducted his estranged wife and two daughters. Police found the mother and her 6 and 7-year-old daughters but the suspect is still at large.



Lt. Thomas Keyes



Sgt. David Jones

FLORIDA GOVERNOR CREATES SILVER ALERT

Florida Governor Charlie Crist signed a law on Oct. 8 creating a Silver Alert to help law enforcement agencies find missing elders with dementia or other cognitive impairments. Law enforcement will contact the media, issue a statewide "Be On the Look Out" and place information on highway signs.

PROGRESS BEING MADE FOR AMBER ALERTS IN INDIAN COUNTRY

Efforts to bring AMBER Alerts to Indian Country have already made some significant changes to keep children safe. Ten Indian Nations created an Indian Country Intelligence Network, began using bloodhounds and Acoma trackers for child abduction cases and started child protection teams.

The Department of Justice is using the ten Tribal Nations to pilot the AMBER Alert in Indian Country (AIIC) Initiative. Special training sessions were held during the 2008 National AMBER Alert Conference for AIIC partners.

Indian Country Liaison Jim Walters outlined these goals for the pilot programs:

- Select a primary contact person
- Determine AMBER Alert criteria
- Identify steps to initiate and cancel alerts
- Establish an AMBER Alert committee with Memorandum Of Understanding for stakeholders

Assistant Attorney General and National AMBER Alert Coordinator Jeffrey L. Sedgwick said this effort has been challenging but the initiative has the backing of the entire Department of Justice.

AMBER ALERT PROMOTION

Congratulations to California AMBER Alert Coordinator LD Maples. On Dec. 2, 2008, California Highway Patrol officials promoted Maples to the rank of Captain.

AMBER INTERNATIONAL

The Netherlands successfully launched a nationwide AMBER Alert system on Nov. 11, 2008. The Dutch AMBER Alert plan allows the public to receive notices of a child abduction by TV, radio, electronic signs, pop-up notices on computers, RSS news feeds, e-mail, text message and instant messaging. The Netherlands Police Agency worked with a software company so alerts could go out in so many different methods instantly.

AMBER Alert Netherlands is based on the American AMBER Alert Plan that has saved the lives of hundreds of children. You can learn more about the Dutch AMBER Alert plan in Dutch or English at the official website www.amberalert-nederland.nl.

"Personally I am very excited about having an AMBER Plan," said Carlo Schippers, Dutch National Police Superintendent. Schippers shared details about the Dutch plan during the International Roundtable Discussion held on the final day of the 2008 National AMBER Alert Conference.

"We have been making plans for several years but we kept running into bureaucratic speed bumps," added Schippers. "I don't think anything we did or have to deal with was necessarily unique. My attendance at the AMBER Alert Conference was helpful in showing me the problems that were overcome during the 12 years of alerts in your country."

The international roundtable included representatives from Canada, Belgium, France, Greece, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Caroline Humer, Program

Manager for the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children moderated the discussion. "For the first time there was an international roundtable of missing persons experts," said Humer. "The discussion focused on the existing and developing efforts on creating AMBER Alert programs in Europe and around the world."

Those sentiments were echoed by Maggie Lazaridis, the "Smile of the Child" representative from Greece. "We think that the information that was shared was invaluable to the Greek AMBER Alert system and we hope to share much of the information with our European partners."

Here are some other developments from the international meeting:

- Greece is taking part in an initiative to provide minimum standards and possibly using a single hotline number for AMBER Alerts in European countries.
- France held a trial alert in June with Luxemburg, Belgium and The Netherlands. The exercise focused on a 6-year-old girl being abducted in Luxemburg and taken to The Netherlands.
- The United Kingdom and France also held a mock alert exercise on Nov. 13, 2008 involving a child traveling by boat across the English Channel.

Charlie Hedges, Liaison and Support Officer for the Missing Persons Bureau in Great Britain, said he would like to see a European AMBER Alert conference next year. "I see AMBER as a vehicle to generate better contacts and working practices in the wider aspects of missing person investigations."

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"I do hope that our launch will trigger more countries to become involved," added Schippers.

The conference once again held workshops for partners working along the North and South borders of the United States. The North Border meeting proposed having a joint summit between U.S. states

and Canadian provinces along the border. Participants in the South Border meeting agreed to have a two-day meeting soon to develop a training curriculum. All countries have basically the same criteria, use law enforcement to initiate the alerts and rely on the broadcasters to help disseminate the message.

AMBER ALERT COMPARISON BY COUNTRY

COUNTRY	France	Greece	United Kingdom	Belgium
NAME	Alerte Enlevement	AMBER Alert Hellas	Child Rescue Alert	Child Alert (unofficial)
STARTED	February 2006	May 2007	Nationally 2006	November 2008

COUNTRY	The Netherlands	United States	Canada
NAME	AMBER Alert	AMBER Alert	AMBER Alert
STARTED	November 2008	Nationally 2002	2003

VICTIMS: FOCUS ON FINDING CHILD INSTEAD OF JUDGING FAMILY

Mika Moulton agreed to be the voice of all parents who have experienced the nightmare of having their child abducted. Her 10-year-old son, Christopher, was abducted and murdered in 1995 by a "monster" who had been released from prison after serving a sentence for killing another child. Moulton was one of 21 family members who participated in the Family Roundtable at the 2008 National AMBER Alert Conference.

Moulton provided a list of do's and don't's in child abduction cases.

Do:

- Provide more training for first responders, detectives and dispatchers
- Speak with sensitivity when talking to family members
- Provide other notification options for cases that don't fit AMBER Alert criteria
- Involve the family in decisions

about prosecution and the media

Don't:

- Make the assumption the child is a runaway
- Allow the media to tell parents the hard details
- Judge a family because there are dirty dishes in the sink
- Let repeat offenders out of prison

"Any child missing is in harm's way," said Moulton. "It doesn't matter if you are poor or rich. If your child is missing a huge part of your heart has been ripped out."

Erin Runnion also shared the experience after her 5-year-old daughter Samantha was kidnapped and murdered by a stranger in 2002. Samantha's body was found the following day about 70 miles from the family home. "When I think of the



TEXAS SHERIFF HONORED AS AMBER ALERT PIONEER

Tarrant County, Texas, Sheriff Dee Anderson was the recipient of the Special Recognition Award at the 2008 National AMBER Alert Conference. Anderson was the media liaison for the Arlington Texas Police Department during the course of the Amber Hagerman investigation. Because of his commitment to the case and collaboration with the area Radio Manager's Association, he was instrumental in helping set up the first AMBER Alert plan. "We're recognizing him for his role in helping to create the Texas AMBER Alert Plan and for his continuing efforts to bring home missing and abducted children," said National AMBER Alert Coordinator Jeffrey L. Sedgwick.



Victim's Family Roundtable participants at the 2008 National AMBER Alert Conference

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fear and confusion that a child must experience when they are abused or abducted it breaks my heart," said Runnion. "It makes me imagine Samantha's screams."

Samantha's abduction prompted the Governor of California to sign an emergency order to create a statewide AMBER Alert plan. Two weeks later a pair of 16-year-old girls were saved by an AMBER Alert. "We all come to the table with invisible scars from our battle and determination to do better for all of our children," added Runnion.

Runnion noted that in the early 1980's about 62 percent of

all abducted children were recovered. Today more than 93 percent are recovered. She explained why she has been working with the Surviving Parents Coalition to change laws and strengthen child recovery efforts. "We can change all the laws we want, but you can't win a war without an offensive."

Finally, Runnion shared that her daughter wrote notes to nearly everyone with her motto: "Be brave." She challenged everyone at the conference to "be brave enough to use our voice to keep this cause in the hearts and minds of everyone." ☺

TEXAS OFFICERS HONORED FOR FINDING ABDUCTED INFANT

The FBI honored more than two dozen local law enforcement officers on Oct. 1, 2008 for finding a 4-day-old infant who was abducted from a Texas medical center. The child was recovered about 26-hours after she was abducted on March 10, 2007. The FBI recognized members of the Lubbock Police Department and the Lubbock County Sheriff's Department for helping in the search. ☺

DALLAS COWBOYS FANS GET TOOL TO FIND MISSING CHILDREN

Fans at the Sept. 20, 2008 Cowboys-Redskins game at Texas Stadium received child identification computer flash drives courtesy of Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott. The flash drives allow parents to store digital copies of their children's recent photographs and other information in case a child goes missing. ☺



VICTIM'S MOTHER PUSHES FOR UTAH AMBER PLAN DONATION

The Davis Chamber of Commerce Women in Business donated \$5,230 to the Utah AMBER Alert Plan on Nov. 13, 2008. The businesswomen were spurred on by Elaine Runyan-Simmons, the mother of 3-year-old Rachel Runyan, who was kidnapped and murdered in 1983. Runyan-Simmons shared her story of trying to recover her daughter without an AMBER Alert and why she is such a big advocate of the child abduction plan. ☺

Broadcasters, continued from page 3

ences.
Charles Bierbauer, former CNN Reporter and University of South Carolina Dean of Mass Communications and Information Studies, also addressed the relationship between media and law enforcement. "As you know journalists and cops don't always see eye-to-eye," said Bierbauer. "We ask too many questions. We file Freedom of Information requests."

However, he said the AMBER Alert has proved to be the one place where the media and law enforcement do have a common purpose. "I'm all for having a watch dog and police dog working together," he said. "There is a genuine benefit of getting this information out when you have the right information." ☺