



**America's
Missing:
Broadcast
Emergency
Response**

The AMBER Alert Plan

Revised May 2010

Maine's Early Warning System
to prevent
Child Abductions



*...providing an important tool for the law enforcement toolkit
to assist in the recovery of abducted children*

Introduction

The AMBER Alert Plan is an innovative way to protect our children, born out of a desire to use maximum public participation to recover children in only the most serious child abduction situations. It is a voluntary cooperative agreement between the Maine Department of Public Safety, the State Emergency Communications Committee, the Maine Association of Broadcasters, and law enforcement agencies in the state of Maine.

The Plan is an early warning system available for use by law enforcement to alert the public when a child has been abducted and the police believe the child is in imminent danger of bodily harm. It is hoped that the information distributed via the statewide broadcast/cable Emergency Alert System (EAS) will lead to the release and safe return of the child.

The AMBER Alert Plan is a tool for law enforcement to promptly notify the media of a confirmed abduction so the information can be broadcast to the public for assistance in locating the child and/or abductor.

AMBER is a voluntary program for law enforcement and broadcasters. AMBER is NOT the entire abducted-child investigation.

SPECIAL NOTE TO BROADCAST STATIONS: Due to a design flaw in the current Emergency Alert System, only the audio portion of an EAS alert will contain all of the pertinent AMBER Alert information. It will not appear on a TV text crawl, nor on the EAS ENDEC printout.

To ensure accuracy, do not try to transcribe the audio AMBER Alert message for follow-up announcements. Instead, subscribe to the Maine Citizen Alert System (CAS) to receive follow-up alert details via e-mail:
<http://www.maine.gov/portal/CAS/index.shtml>.

Be sure to subscribe one or several e-mail addresses that are readily accessible by all station personnel at all hours of the day and night, and on weekends. Give consideration to the fact that an AMBER Alert may be issued at a time when, for example, news personnel are not on duty at the station.

When signing up for Citizen Alerts, also be sure to sign up to receive news releases from the Maine State Police/Dept. of Public Safety and the Maine Emergency Management Agency.

Maine AMBER Alert Plan ~ Requirements

1. The AMBER Plan requires law enforcement to meet three criteria when evaluating a child abduction. Police departments **must** have **all 3** criteria present before an EAS activation can occur.

The AMBER Plan should be activated ONLY when:

(1) a child 17 years of age or younger is abducted*,

AND

(2) there is reason to believe the victim is in imminent danger of serious bodily injury or death,

AND

(3) there is information available to disseminate to the general public which could assist in the safe recovery of the victim and/or the apprehension of a suspect.

2. The AMBER Plan is activated **only** when the specific requirements of the plan are met as outlined above. An AMBER activation is *not* to be used for runaways, most child custody disputes, or missing children. An AMBER activation is appropriate *only* for child abduction cases where there is strong evidence that the abductor intends to cause imminent bodily harm to the child.

3. After receiving a report of a child abduction, the investigating agency determines whether the incident meets the requirements of the AMBER Plan. If it does, the agency contacts the Maine State Police (MSP) to request activation of the AMBER Plan. MSP then approves issuance of an AMBER Alert through the statewide Emergency Alert System (EAS).

4. When the Maine State Police activates the system through the state EAS, it will immediately be delivered to all participating radio and television stations and cable TV systems in Maine.

The AMBER Alert goes out only once via the State EAS system. Participating broadcast stations should then announce the information every half hour for the first four hours, then one time per hour for the next four hours.

In addition to activating the EAS, the Maine State Police will distribute all pertinent information relating to the abduction via e-mail through the State of Maine Citizen Alert system.

**The word "abducted" is a cause of concern and should be addressed. Law enforcement should make every attempt to verify that an actual abduction has taken place, but some margin for error must be tolerated. If the above guidelines are otherwise met but there is no concrete confirmation of an abduction, then the activation may go forward if it is warranted in the judgment of law enforcement authorities. Each case under this scenario should be independently evaluated based on the facts and circumstances thereof.*

While intended for use in cases of stranger abduction, the AMBER plan may also be activated in cases of parental abduction, or abduction by another person known to the child, if the parent or person has made threatening statements or otherwise indicated that he/she intends to commit imminent bodily harm to the child. Again, each such case should be evaluated based on the pertinent facts and circumstances.

Law enforcement agencies are cautioned that overuse of the AMBER Alert system, or issuance of alerts that do not meet the criteria, may cause the public to "tune out" alerts, thus hampering the effectiveness of the system.

5. Investigations of child abductions are coordinated by the law enforcement agency having jurisdiction where the child is domiciled. Except in areas where it has sole jurisdiction, the Maine State Police/MDPS is generally only the conduit for issuance of statewide alerts. Thus, all media questions and requests for information should be directed to the investigating agency.

6. If the child is recovered during the activation period of the alert, the reporting agency must notify MDPS, which will then cancel the alert through normal news-release channels. It is the responsibility of the individual radio and television stations to follow up with the investigating agency regarding additional information about the abduction.

7. By broadcasting frequent public alerts, descriptions, and other vital information in the crucial first hours after a child abduction, we can enlist citizens in an effort to recover the child unharmed. All calls to radio or TV stations or cable systems from citizens who have information regarding the abduction should be directed to the investigating agency.

AMBER Alert procedures for law enforcement and the media

LAW ENFORCEMENT	MEDIA
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Determine a child abduction meeting the AMBER criteria has occurred. 2. Call the Maine State Police (MSP) at 624-7076 or 1-800-452-4664 and ask to speak to a Criminal Investigation Division (CID) Lieutenant or Sergeant concerning an AMBER Alert. 3. MSP will confirm the accuracy of the information and, if warranted, will approve the issuance of an AMBER Alert via the State Emergency Alert System (EAS) using the CAE (Child Abduction Emergency) code. 4. This information is also passed through NLETS (National Law Enforcement Teletype System) to all law enforcement agencies having access to it. 5. The investigating agency will make photos of the victim available to the media as soon as possible. Media may also have follow-up questions. The investigating agency should designate an officer or staff person as the media contact for inquiries. 6. As soon as the case is resolved, notify the MSP, which will then cancel the alert through normal news-release channels. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participating broadcast stations' and cable systems' EAS encoder-decoder units must be programmed to receive and retransmit the CAE (Child Abduction Emergency) code. 2. Sign up to receive follow-on AMBER Alert information via e-mail through the State of Maine Citizen Alert System (CAS) at http://www.maine.gov/portal/CAS/index.shtml. 3. The AMBER Alert will come to broadcast stations and cable systems via your EAS receiver. Your receiver may be programmed for an automatic interrupt of programming, or for delay. If delayed, the alert should be broadcast within 15 minutes of receipt. <i>Getting the information on the air as soon as possible is the key factor.</i> The most crucial time in an abduction case is the first few hours. 4. We ask broadcast stations and cable systems to transmit the pertinent information via live announcement (<i>not</i> by retransmitting the EAS alert), using the facts as detailed in the Citizen Alert, at least once every 30 minutes for the first 4 hours, then at least once an hour for the next 4 hours. 5. Prompt dissemination of an abduction alert is an integral part of the AMBER Plan. It is important that we have maximum participation from stations and cable systems "up and down the line," as the abductor may have traveled over a wide area within the first several hours of the abduction. 6. Follow-up requests for additional information should be directed to the investigating agency.

Exhibit 1

AMBER Plan

Requirements For Participating Law Enforcement Agency:

1. Must have **at least one (1) designated reporting officer.**
2. Must have adopted a **written policy** which deals with the operation of the AMBER Plan. (A model policy is available from the Maine Criminal Justice Academy.)
3. Must submit **supporting reports** for activation of the AMBER Plan to the AMBER Plan Committee within 30 days of activation and must participate in a **review of the activation.**

Requirements For AMBER Plan Reporting Officer (MSP):

1. Reporting officer must be a sworn law enforcement officer.
2. Reporting officer must complete training provided by or suggested by the AMBER Plan Committee (at a minimum, an annual review of the Maine AMBER Alert Plan and viewing of the AMBER training video).
3. Reporting officer must present a briefing to the Maine AMBER Plan Committee at the next scheduled meeting following the activation of an AMBER Alert.

Exhibit 2

AMBER Plan

Law Enforcement Checklist

1. IS THE ABDUCTION ONE IN WHICH THE CHILD VICTIM IS 17 YEARS OF AGE OR YOUNGER?

If YES, GO ON to QUESTION 2.

If NO, DO NOT ACTIVATE THE AMBER PLAN

2. WAS THE CHILD ABDUCTION WITNESSED BY ANYONE?

If YES, GATHER AS MUCH DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION AS POSSIBLE AND GO ON TO QUESTION 3

3. DID THE CHILD ABDUCTION INVOLVE AN ACT OF VIOLENCE, OR DO YOU BELIEVE THE CHILD TO BE IN DANGER OF IMMINENT BODILY HARM OR DEATH?

If YES, ACTIVATE THE AMBER PLAN

If NO, DO NOT ACTIVATE THE AMBER PLAN

4. THE ALERT MUST CONTAIN:

- A DESCRIPTION OF THE CHILD,
- DETAILS OF THE ABDUCTION,
- INFORMATION THAT THE PUBLIC CAN ACT ON (for example, a description of the perpetrator, description of a vehicle, etc.), AND
- THE NAME AND TELEPHONE NUMBER OF THE INVESTIGATING AGENCY.

THE INVESTIGATING AGENCY SHOULD NOT ACTIVATE THE PLAN UNLESS AND UNTIL THERE IS INFORMATION TO INCLUDE IN AN ALERT MESSAGE.

AMBER Alert Information --- To Be Sent On MLETS
(Sample)

Agency Data

Agency _____ Officer's Name _____
Telephone Number _____ Reporting Agency _____

Case Data	Yes	No*
Is this believed to be a child abduction? <i>(not a missing child, runaway, or custody dispute unless there is strong evidence that the child is in imminent danger of bodily harm from the abducting parent)</i>		
Was this child 17 years of age or younger?		
Is there reason to believe the victim is in imminent danger of serious injury or death?		
Is there information to disseminate to the general public which could assist in the safe recovery of the victim and/or the apprehension of a suspect?		

*An answer of **No** to any of the above questions renders the AMBER Alert non-applicable.

Victim Data

First Name _____ Last Name _____
Age _____ Race _____ Gender _____
Clothing Description _____
Last Known Location _____ Date of Event _____

Victim Data #2

First Name _____ Last Name _____
Age _____ Race _____ Gender _____
Clothing Description _____

Suspect Data

First Name _____ Last Name _____
Race _____ Gender _____
Clothing Description _____ Approx. age _____

Suspect Data #2

First Name _____ Last Name _____
Race _____ Gender _____
Clothing Description _____ Approx. age _____

Vehicle Data

Year _____ Make _____ Model _____ Color _____
Style _____ License Plate _____ License State _____

AMBER ALERT SAMPLE ALERT MESSAGE PROGRAM AND SCRIPT

When issuing an AMBER Alert, take a few moments to script out the alert message following the format shown below. Remember, this script will form the basis not only for the EAS Alert, but also for a Maine Citizen Alert System message and for messages on highway signs and state lottery terminals.

EAS Header Code 3 times

One Second Pause

EAS Attention Signal (0:08)

Special AMBER Alert (CAE) Code

Announcer:

The Maine State Police are issuing a statewide AMBER Alert at the request of the [Maine City] Police Department. A fourteen-year-old Caucasian female was abducted from 2825 Royal Lane, Maine City, this morning at approximately 9:00 a.m. She is approximately 5 feet 2 inches tall, 110 pounds, with black hair, wearing a gray T-shirt, white jeans, and blue baseball cap. She was last seen with a 50-year-old white male, approximately 6 feet tall and weighing 200 pounds, driving a blue Chevrolet pick-up truck with Maine license plates. If you have any information regarding this abduction, please call the [Maine City] Police Department at (555) 555-5555. That's (555) 555-5555. This has been an AMBER Alert. We now return to regular programming.

EAS End-of-Message Code 3 times

Maine AMBER Alert Law Enforcement Protocol

1. Determine if the case fits the AMBER Alert criteria.

Review the pertinent information to determine if all three criteria for an alert are met:

- a) Is the child 17 years of age or younger?
- b) Is there reason to believe the victim is in imminent danger of serious bodily injury or death?
- c) Is there information available to disseminate to the general public which could assist in the safe recovery of the victim and/or the apprehension of a suspect?

2. Call Maine Public Safety Dispatch in Augusta at 624-7076 or 1-800-452-4664 and ask to speak with a Criminal Investigation Division Lieutenant or Sergeant regarding an AMBER Alert request.

The State Police will conduct another review of the pertinent information to ensure that the criteria have been met.

<u>If criteria are not met:</u>	<u>If criteria are met:</u>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Notify investigating officer.b. Follow established protocols for case investigation.c. Notify PIO of case status.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Provide State Public Safety dispatch with the point-of-contact name and phone number for your agency. This is essential for individuals responding to the alert in an effort to provide information.2. Notify NLETS of AMBER Activation and Teletype all victim/suspect information needed for statewide broadcast to MSP.3. Make notification of AMBER Alert to the following resources:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. On-duty Major Crimes Detective Captain<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Exploitation Detective Captain2. Child Crisis Supervisor3. Child Crisis Duty Pager4. Designate a field command center to coordinate search efforts.5. Coordinate with phone bank supervisor on search/phone bank developments.6. Continue to evaluate field search and use resources as needed.

Resource considerations

Mounted Patrol	Motorcycles	Helicopter	SOT
Dive Team	K-9	Gang Unit	
Citizen Volunteers	Police Reserve	Explorers	

Activation of incident command if necessary

This procedure is initiated when a phone bank is required to answer numerous phone calls from the community, or it may be used during any other large-scale incident with the potential of multi-jurisdictional response.