

# Amber Plan

## Background

Amber Hagerman, a nine-year-old from Arlington, Texas, was abducted in front of witnesses in 1996 while innocently riding her bicycle. Her body was found four days later. In response to community concern following this tragedy, the Association of Radio Managers with the assistance of area law enforcement in Arlington, Texas, created the "Amber Plan." Named for Amber Hagerman, the Plan is a cooperative effort between public entities to report serious child abduction cases.

Under the Plan, radio and television stations immediately interrupt programming to broadcast information about a child abduction by using a system typically used for weather or other civil emergencies. Since the Amber Plan was established in Texas, many areas across the country have adopted a similar alert plan on the local, regional, or statewide level. The plan is simple – to alert the public as quickly as possible to child abduction in hopes of gaining information which will lead to the safe recovery of that child and capture of the abductor. Between 1996 and 2001, the alert system has been credited with the safe return of at least fifteen children.

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has endorsed the use of the Amber Plan as used in Texas to assist in the most serious child abduction cases and is promoting the use of such emergency alert plans nationwide. The NCMEC has carefully assessed all current plans in use around the country and is developing a guidebook called, "AMBER Plan, America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response"

## Statement of Purpose

Sadly, more than 2,000 children are reported missing every day across America. Tragically, many of these children are never returned to their caretakers, and many are victims of assault and murder. A 1997 study by the Washington States Attorney indicated that 74% of children abducted and murdered by strangers were killed within three hours of being taken.

Realizing that time is of the essence in these cases, participating agencies agree that the abduction of a child is of the highest priority for response and investigation. In furtherance of this type of investigation, a carefully planned and quick notification to the public by commercial broadcast methods, the "AMBER Plan", can be a valuable tool in the recovery of abducted children.

The purpose of the AMBER Plan is for Law Enforcement Agencies to collaborate with local broadcasters and other public entities in serious child abduction investigations for the safe and swift return of missing children.

## Activation of the Northwest Missouri Amber Plan

The **Northwest Missouri Amber Plan** will be set in motion for the Northwest Missouri area by one of the cooperating police agencies.

When a child-abduction is reported and investigation reveals that:

1. The child is 14 years of age or younger, or 15 through 17 years given consideration to the conduct of the victim perhaps contributing to their disappearance, and/or;
2. The child's safety is at risk, and;
3. The abductor and/or child are likely to still be in the Northwest Missouri

broadcast area, and;

4. There is a likelihood someone provided with a description of the abductor, the child, or the vehicle involved may observe and report the whereabouts of this person(s) to the police, then;

The authorized Law Enforcement agency investigating the case may activate the Amber Plan by notifying the media organizations for broadcast to the public as soon as practical. All alerts will be reviewed by a committee comprised of at least three Law Enforcement supervisors and three members of the cooperating agencies quarterly to ensure compliance with the above activation criteria.

After abduction is confirmed or a high risk to safety of the missing child exists, and it meets all points for activation, the investigating agency sends the information by FAX and/or phone to the participating stations along with the normal regional and NCIC notifications. The participating media outlets then broadcast the lookout(s) to the public.

The information is furnished to other member agencies who will notify their employees to be on the lookout for the missing/abducted child.

## **Definitions**

### **Abduction**

A child is reported to be involuntarily missing from the person(s) having care-taking responsibilities for the child. There is an eyewitness who states that the child was taken by a person or persons for whom there is a physical description, a vehicle description (if one is involved), and a direction of travel from the point last seen. Lacking an eyewitness, there exists articulable evidence that the child's disappearance was not voluntary.

### **Missing at High Risk**

When a child is missing and extenuating circumstances, i.e. age, mental capacity, area where the child is believed to be, etc., exist the child may be deemed to be at high risk.

### **Child**

A person under the age of 18.

Particular consideration must be given when a child between the ages of 15 and 17 are reported missing as to their own behavior or mental capacity in some way contributing to the criminal activity. A child under 14 cannot legally give consent for any action and therefore that age group should be considered more at risk.

### **Other Participating Agencies**

Any other entity in the Northwest Missouri area is encouraged to participate in the program. Other entities include but are not limited to:

1. Public Utilities
2. Public Transportation
3. Any agency that is out in the community on a regular basis

### **Activation of the Northwest Missouri AMBER Plan**

Only police officers pre-designated by the Chief Law Enforcement Officer of a participating agency or by this Memorandum of Understanding may activate the Northwest Missouri Amber Plan. The investigating police agency will notify the participating media and other agencies by phone and FAX. The media stations and other participating members will then call the investigating agency to validate the alert.

### **Broadcast to the public-**

The activating Law Enforcement agency will transmit a message to all participating area media outlets via phone and/or FAX. The notification should include the following information:

**"This is a Child Abduction Alert – please stand by for important information".**

The alert should include this information.

1. A child has reportedly been abducted or reported missing and at risk;
2. Where the abduction took place or the child is missing from;
3. A description of the child;
4. A description of the abductor or who the child was last with;
5. A description of the vehicle involved if any;
6. The last known direction of travel or last known location;
7. A telephone number to contact the police with any information. This alert should be broadcast up to 3 times per hour after the initial alert for the first two hours. The alert should conclude with a statement that the person(s) who may locate the abductor should take no action other than to call the local police as soon as possible and provide them with the location. Updated alerts may be broadcast if new information may result in the location of the abductor and/or the child, or they have been found.