

Elizabeth Smart Brings AMBER Alert Message Home

Abduction Survivor's Story Galvanizes 2007 National AMBER Alert Conference

After a man broke into her home and put a knife to her throat, Elizabeth Smart feared the worst. "I am going to die," she said. "I know I am going to die."

The abduction of the 14-year-old Salt Lake City girl in 2002 brought worldwide attention to AMBER Alerts. Smart is now a 19-year-old college student. She shared her tale of survival and hope on the final day of the 2007 National AMBER Alert Conference in Denver.

Smart said her perfect life was shattered when an assailant broke into the bedroom where she and her sister were sleeping. "Don't say anything or you will be killed," she

recalled him saying. "He took me into the mountains and I kept thinking this is the end."

After being held for nine months, some ordinary citizens recognized Smart with her captors and called police. "I knew I was returned because people kept looking for me," she said.

"Nothing could have prepared me," Smart said. "I don't think anyone can be prepared, but the community can be prepared. That's why the AMBER Alert is so crucial to this nation."

On the opening day of the conference, former Acting Assistant Attorney

Continued on page 3



Elizabeth Smart, addresses the 2007 National AMBER Alert Conference

AMBER Alert Awareness Day

National AMBER Alert Awareness Day Brings Attention to Abducted Children

State AMBER Alert Coordinators proved there is more than one way to celebrate National AMBER Alert Awareness Day. The January 13 date commemorates the day Amber Hagerman was abducted in Texas in 1996. Here is a sampling of how National AMBER Alert Awareness Day was celebrated in 2008:

CART The North Florida Child Abduction Response Team (CART) became the first CART to receive national certification by the U.S. Department of Justice. The 38-agency team conducted a full-scale exercise to fulfill the certification requirements.

In Corpus Christi, Texas, law enforcement officers from twelve counties met to finalize details for a

regional CART.

FUNDRAISER Minnesota accepted two \$10,000 checks from an AMBER Alert fundraiser.

NOAA Mississippi announced an agreement to use the National Weather Service to expand the state's AMBER Alert Plan.

POSTERS Many states including Ohio, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Texas, Minnesota, Nebraska, Utah and Wisconsin launched the Missing Children's Day Poster Contest. The state of Wisconsin announced the poster contest over a webcast and distributed child safety kits.

PROCLAMATIONS Governors in Arizona, Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois,

Continued on page 8

What You'll Find Inside

On The Front Lines - Florida pg.2

Profile: Janell Rasmussen pg.4

Family Call To Action .. pg.5

AMBER in Indian Country pg.6

Canadian Corner pg.7

On The Front Lines

Florida AMBER Alert Saves Child From Internet Predator



Florida Department of Law Enforcement Commissioner Gerald Bailey, right, accepts the country's first national CART certification from Phil Keith, left, the Program Director for the Amber Initiative with the U.S. Department of Justice.



William Mitchell

the 15-year-old missing girl had been corresponding on the Internet with a 46-year-old registered sex offender. William Mitchell was convicted five years earlier of sexually abusing a child. On Oct. 1, authorities said Mitchell took the young girl and was believed to be carrying a handgun.

The Polk County Sheriff's Office initiated the AMBER Alert at 2 a.m. on Oct. 2, the day after Florida enacted a new law requiring stricter penalties for sex crimes involving children. The maximum sentence for child pornography and solicitation to meet minors for sex was tripled to 15 years in prison. The law also requires sex offenders to register their e-mail addresses and instant message handles with authorities.

Florida AMBER Alert Coordinator Donna Hodges said everyone immediately started doing everything possible to find the girl. "We are always intense when an AMBER Alert goes out," she said. "We don't rest until the child is rescued."

In addition to issuing the AMBER Alert, analysts from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement Missing Children Information Clearinghouse searched various databases to find everything possible about the missing child and the suspect. FDLE agents were also assigned to work with authorities in Polk and Walton Counties.

It began as another runaway case. But the Sheriff's Office in Polk County Florida did some additional checking and discovered

Authorities said Mitchell took the victim to Alabama and at one point threatened to kill her. However, he drove back to Florida and dropped the girl off at a Walmart about 400 miles from her home. Police recovered the victim after they were notified by a shopper about a "suspicious incident." The AMBER Alert was cancelled at 1:30 p.m.

"The AMBER Alert worked the way it was supposed to," said Hodges. "Authorities believe the AMBER Alert convinced the predator to drop the child off."

Florida Department of Law Enforcement Special Agent Supervisor Lee Condon said it wasn't just the AMBER Alert that saved her. "It was investigators pursuing leads instead of

saying 'She's just a runaway.' It was people reporting they saw


something that

was not right. It was the victim realizing she was in danger," she said.

"The AMBER Alert absent an investigation is an AMBER Alert absent a kid."

Mitchell was arrested Oct. 6 at a truck stop in Virginia.

Both Condon and Hodges said this was a textbook case where the Missing Persons Clearinghouse worked hand in hand with law enforcement. They also hope it will provide a powerful lesson to everyone in law enforcement that a runaway can be in real danger.

"Children don't always make mature decisions," said Condon. "Running away shouldn't be a death sentence or negate the fact that a child missing requires community and law enforcement action." 

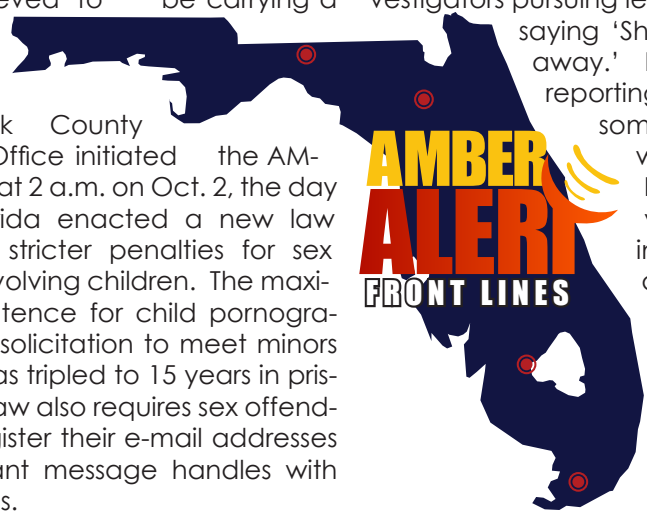
A Note of Thanks:

I just wanted to take a moment to say thank you to you and everyone involved at Fox Valley Technical Institute. The training I received has definitely been some of the best, most professionally delivered training that I have received in my 24 years in law enforcement. Every Law Enforcement officer across this country should have the good fortune to attend at least one of your training sessions. Their communities would definitely benefit from the instruction of your presenters.

My officers that attended the recent CART training in San Diego, along with the officers from Stratford Police Department, raved about the quality of their training and are pushing to get more officers trained. Anyway, thanks again for everything.

Sincerely,

Anthony R. Campbell
Somerdale New Jersey
Chief of Police



SMART, continued from page 1

ney General and former National AMBER Alert Coordinator Cybele K. Daley shared the story of a kidnaper who dropped off a seven-year-old victim after he heard there was an AMBER Alert. "When we hear AMBER Alerts talked about now, we hear it as a deterrent and means of prevention," said Daley. "Its reputation as a crime stopper is fully established."



Cybele K. Daley, Former Acting National AMBER Alert Coordinator

Daley said the unofficial theme of the three-day conference is "strengthening partnerships."

trator for the Office of Justice Programs' Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, said those partners have become like family. "We're one big family and we can make a difference," he said. "We are the driving force in protecting children."

But the stakes are high if the partnerships fail said Phil Keith, AMBER Alert Program Director for Fox Valley Technical College. "Our weakest link will in fact cause us to lose a child," he said.

Knoxville Police Department Assistant Chief Gus Paidousis shared the history of AMBER Alerts and offered details about the changes that have occurred during the past 11 years. He said AMBER Alert plans keep getting better but warned that no one will ever be finished. "No matter how good we get, you have to practice every day," said Paidousis. "You can't ever say we're as good as we will ever be."

Robert Hoever, Associate Director of Training and Outreach at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, offered a statistical breakdown of all AMBER Alerts from January 1, 2004 to September 15, 2007. During that period, more than

889 alerts were issued for 1091 children. "A staggering figure is that 99 percent of all of those cases have been resolved," said Hoever. "Only 15 cases are still unresolved." The study also found that 98 percent of the children were recovered within 72 hours. One out of five children were recovered directly from the AMBER Alert.

Nevada AMBER Alert Coordinator Bob Fisher talked about the role of broadcasters in AMBER Alerts. "The love-hate relationship between law enforcement and broadcasters needs to become a relationship of respect," he said. "Broadcasters are part of the family of first responders."

Broadcasters were included in the first mock activation of Florida's new Child Abduction Response Team. Floy Turner, a retired special agent for the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, talked about how the CART is becoming increasingly important for every AMBER Alert plan. "With a CART, we can hit the ground running," she said. "We're not standing around waiting for a task."



2007 National AMBER Alert Conference in Denver Colorado

The conference included breakout sessions for AMBER Alert coordinators, broadcasters, transportation officials and law enforcement officers. Conference participants also learned more about the Adam Walsh Act, new tools for child abuse investigations and new resources for AMBER Alert plans. Coordinators from three states shared their first hand experience on cases where they did and did not activate alerts. ☺

ENDANGERED PERSON ADVISORY UPDATE

More states are adding plans to handle cases that do not meet the AMBER Alert criteria. Utah AMBER Alert Coordinator Paul Murphy shared a survey on the Endangered Person Advisory at the National AMBER Alert Conference. He has updated the numbers for *The AMBER Advocate*.

In 2005, only 5 states had a formal alert system for non-AMBER situations. In 2007, a total of 12 states have formal plans that include all ages. Nine states have alerts with age restrictions, either for senior citizens or children under 18. Another 12 states have informal plans. The remaining 16 states do not have a plan but many are developing something for non-AMBER situations.

Current trends being seen in states with AMBER Alert and endangered persons plans include: AMBER partner involvement; broadcasters determine when to air advisories; most states use similar criteria; and very few plans use Highway Advisory Signs or use "AMBER" in the title. Most states indicated the same needs: training, uniformity, best practices and public awareness.

CELL PHONE PUSH

Executive Director of the Wireless Foundation David Diggs asked AMBER Alert partners to help educate the public about receiving AMBER Alerts on their cell phones. He said the alerts can be received by 96 percent of all cell phone carriers but so far only 400,000 people have subscribed to the free service. "I am concerned we are not getting the word out to customers," said Diggs. "There is no catch. This is a public service."

Profile: Janell Rasmussen



Minnesota AMBER Alert Coordinator, Janell Rasmussen

Janell Rasmussen, Minnesota's AMBER Alert Coordinator, had plans to make millions in real estate. But somehow her career goals got sidetracked and she ended up saving lots of kids because of the path she did take. In July 2001, Rasmussen assisted in creating a seven state AMBER Alert plan. It was a natural fit because the Minnesota Crime Alert Network was already notifying the public about crimes, she said.

"We wanted a statewide plan from the get go," said Rasmussen. "It's been amazing how people came together."

As soon as she started the AMBER Alert in Minnesota, people started volunteering to help make the plan better. Lottery officials offered to put the alerts on lottery machines, billboard companies volunteered to put the alerts on their signs and the Minnesota Trucking Association said they could get the word out through their dispatchers.

"We got so many calls from people wanting to get information out," said Rasmussen. Despite the original rush to help, she still looks for new partners. "We have been training 11 Tribes and now all of the Tribes are working with us to send out AMBER Alerts," she said. "One Tribe just approved putting AMBER Alerts on casino signs."

One of the most notable aspects of the Minnesota AMBER Alert Plan is that from the very beginning it included alerts for cases that did not meet the AMBER Alert criteria. Has anyone been confused by the second level alert? "It's completely the opposite," said Rasmussen. "The media loves it and runs stories on everything we have sent them. It absolutely works here."

"The two-tier system has been very effective and has helped us have a low number of AMBER Alerts. We

have had more than 150 requests for AMBER Alerts. It has done a good job of keeping it with the criteria."

Minnesota has had 18 AMBER Alerts so far but Rasmussen said, the abduction of 11-year-old Cindy Bruno stands out. Police in Minnesota asked Utah to issue an alert because they had evidence the girl and the suspect were going there. A Utah trooper saw the alert, started calculating how long it would take to get from Minnesota to Utah and then looked up and saw the suspect's van.

"That was the first time I was aware of where two states worked together and had a success," said Rasmussen. "It was a great use of the AMBER Alert system."

Rasmussen recently had the opportunity to train a team from India on setting up an AMBER Alert Plan. She said they faced similar issues but the interpreters had to keep reminding her to slow down. "When you talk about something you are passionate about it's hard to slow down."

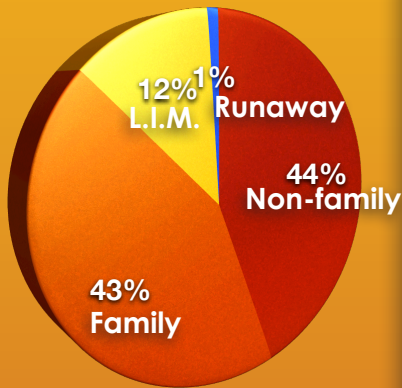
Even though she looks young, Rasmussen is one of the few veteran AMBER Alert Coordinators. She offered advice for new coordinators. "Know what is going on in your state," she said. "No matter what every other state is doing, your system will be unique. Utilize good information from other states but you still have to decide what works best in your state."

After the 2007 AMBER Alert Conference, Rasmussen said she walked away with "a list of things to do".

From her early dreams of making it rich in real estate, Rasmussen said the AMBER Alert is more personal to her now that she has a four-year-old daughter and a three-year-old son. "When you have children, you worry about each child and worry about the dangers and you know you have to do a better job. You know you have to do more every day to protect them as best you can." ☺

AMBER Fact:

The following is a breakdown for the 261 AMBER Alerts in 2006:



115 (44%) Non-Family Abductions

113 (43%) Family Abductions

31 (12%) Lost, Injured or Missing

2 (1%) Endangered Runaway

Families of Abducted Children Offer Call to Action

Abby Potash is grateful so much has been done lately to save abducted children but she says much more needs to be accomplished. Her son, Sam, was abducted in 1997 and recovered a year later due to a mailer with Sam's picture. She challenged everyone at the 2007 National AMBER Alert Conference to try even harder to find missing children.

"Missing children should be a priority," said Potash. "We only have one main goal and that is to find our children safely and quickly."

Potash said officers need to start taking missing children cases seriously from the beginning. She said families of missing children need more help to work with the media. Finally, she said a Child Abduction Response Team should be mandatory in each community.

"It takes a village to raise a child," said Potash. "It takes a village to search for a missing child as well."

Potash was one of 17 people who participated in a Family Roundtable at the conference. Ron Laney, Associate Administrator for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Child Protection Division, asked the group to get together annually to modify training to help families.

The family members were divided into four discussion groups. Here are some of their findings:

First Responders Most family members said the first police officers to arrive at the scene did not take the situation seriously and did not have a coordinated response. Some family members said officers were often negative and accusatory instead of empathetic and sensitive. Patty and Trevor Wetterling said the first responders in their case did a great

job because they had experience with another abduction case.

Investigation

Family members said investigators were hampered by jurisdictional disputes, some allowed the crime scene to be contaminated and some failed to keep the family informed about what was going on. "The law enforcement goal was prosecution. Our goal was to find Erika," said Pam Schmidt. Pam's nine-year-old granddaughter Erika Baker was abducted in 1999. Some family members said the investigations improved with time.

Prosecutors Mixed reactions were offered by family members about prosecutors. Some said the prosecutors were wonderful and knew what they were doing, whereas others said they were lied to and some prosecutors did not seek the stiffest punishment for offenders.

Media Some family members offered horror stories about the media but most appreciated how reporters were able to generate interest for searches and put pressure on law enforcement to help find their child. "No matter how much the media likes you, they are after a story," said Don Ryce who's nine-year-old son Jimmy was sexually assaulted and killed while trying to escape in 1995.

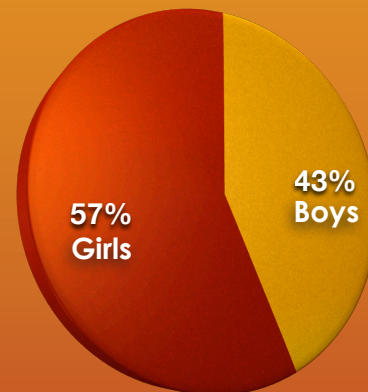
All conference participants had the opportunity to hear Trevor Wetterling offer a sibling's perspective of an abduction. In 1989, Trevor was riding his bike with his 11-year-old brother Jacob when they were ap-



Participants in the Family Roundtable at the 2007 National AMBER Alert Conference

AMBER Fact:

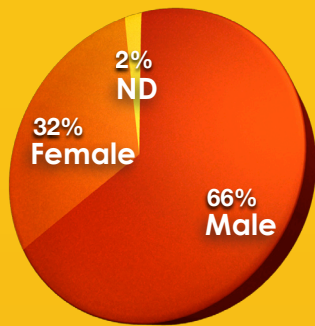
In 2006, 57% of all AMBER Alerts were issued for girls and 43% were issued for boys.



Continued on page 6

AMBER Fact:

The abductor profile for 2006:



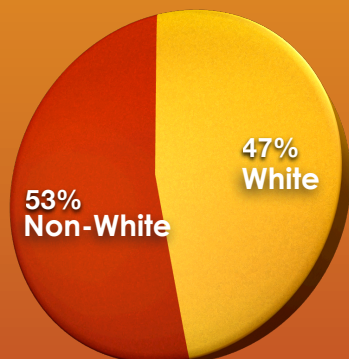
Male 66%
Female 32%
No Data 2%

AMBER Fact:

In 2006, a vehicle was used in two-thirds of all abductions where AMBER Alerts were activated.

AMBER Fact:

In 2006, 47% of all AMBER Alerts were issued for white children and 53% were issued for non-white children.



Blueprint Started For AMBER Alerts In Indian Country

When a Native American warrior went out to protect the homeland, a horse would sometimes come back without a rider, a poignant symbol of what was lost. Davis Washines from the Yakama Tribe performed a song about fallen warriors to start the Native American Roundtable at the 2007 National AMBER Alert Conference. The song helped set the tone about the children who have been lost and the commitment needed to bring missing children home.

"There are unique challenges in Indian Country," said Jim Walters, AMBER Alert Liaison for Indian Country. "Education and training will be needed to get the communities involved." Participants included members from the ten pilot sites picked by the Department of Justice to bring AMBER Alerts to Indian Country. Walters asked the group to identify the strengths and weaknesses in Native American communities so they could create a blueprint of what needed to be done.

Strengths include:

- Close-knit communities-ability to easily recognize strangers
- Collaboration-use to working with outside and neighboring agencies
- Boys & Girls Clubs/Teen Centers-staff and children know what is going on with other children

FAMILIES, continued from page 5

proached by a man with a mask and a jacket with the words "Police Department" printed on it.

"Stop, I have a gun," Trevor recalled the man saying. "He told us to go to the ditch and lay down. He told me to run to the woods as fast as I could or he would shoot."

Emotions welled up in the audience as the 9-1-1 call was played which included Trevor trying to explain



Breakout groups set AMBER Alert plans in action

Weaknesses include:

- Stigma of abuse - missing children cases are rarely reported because people are reluctant to talk about problems as a way of "protecting our own"
- Tribal Council influence
- Pride

"The input from Tribal communities is very important to find out what is needed to bring the AMBER Alert into Indian Country," added Phil Keith, AMBER Alert Program Director for Fox Valley Technical College.

Participants identified the action steps needed to make sure law enforcement is trained and the public is educated about AMBER Alerts. The ten pilot sites are the first phase of the plan to bring the alerts into Indian Country. The ten sites will set the example for the next phase which is anticipated to include 30 pilot sites. ☺

to the dispatcher what had happened. Trevor said he was not able to talk about what happened until last year when he was asked to help put together a Sibling's Guide. He said he still has hope to see his brother again. "My brother has never been found and we have no reason to believe that he is not out there." ☺

CANADIAN CORNER

New Report Shows Trends In Canadian AMBER Alerts

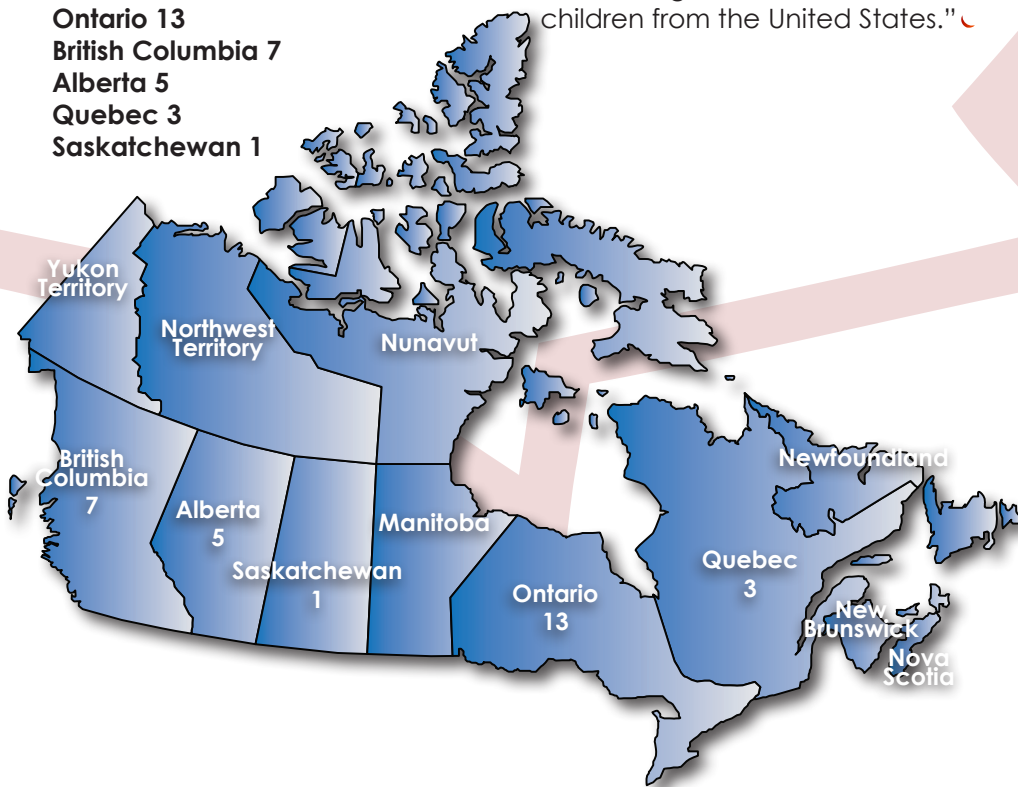
Canada's first comprehensive report on AMBER Alerts shows that the majority of child abductions were committed by family members. Since 2002 Canada has issued 29 alerts for 35 children. Here is the breakdown on the relationship between the abductor and the victim in each case:

- Family Member 16**
- Stranger 8**
- Acquaintance of Family 5**

"It just goes to show you that parents are the most likely to harm their children," said Marie-France Olivera, Canada AMBER Alert Coordinator for National Missing Children Services. Olivera has been collecting data from the AMBER Alert Coordinators for each province and territory.

The report also shows the number of AMBER Alerts issued by each province:

- Ontario 13**
- British Columbia 7**
- Alberta 5**
- Quebec 3**
- Saskatchewan 1**



No alerts have been issued by five provinces and all three territories. "The other provinces and territories have plans that are up and running but they have only been tested," said Olivera. "When they finally have an activation they will find out if their plan works."

The report shows that two children were abducted from hospitals, two from restaurants and two were taken in a stolen vehicle. Two children were abducted at knife-point and three children were murdered after they were abducted-including one child who was dismembered by a man who said he was consumed by child pornography. Canada has only cancelled one alert for not meeting the AMBER Alert criteria.

Olivera encourages AMBER Alert Coordinators in the United States to become familiar with their Canadian counterparts. She offered a very good reason: "About 75 percent of our missing children cases involve children from the United States."

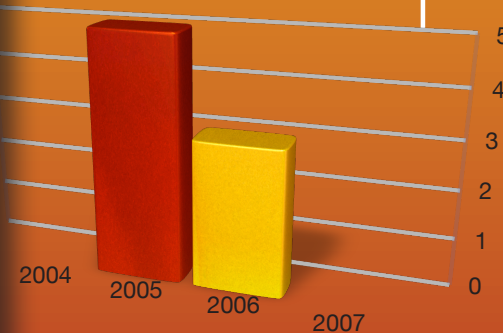


Marie-France Olivera, Canada AMBER Alert Coordinator for National Missing Children Services

AMBER Fact:

Total AMBER Alerts issued for international abductions:

- 2004 - None
- 2005 - 5 (4 Mexico, 1 Lebanon)
- 2006 - 3 (2 Mexico, 1 Honduras)
- 2007 - None



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Best Practices Coming for Electronic Billboards

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children is developing Best Practices for digital billboards. NCMEC is working with manufacturers and software vendors on a coordinated and standardized approach. The effort is similar to the Wireless AMBER Alerts Program (32 participating wireless companies) and the AMBER Highway Network (91 participating trucking companies).

AMBER Alert Extranet Is Expanding

The AMBER Alert Extranet will soon be available for Missing Person Clearinghouse Managers and Tribal representatives. AMBER Alert Coordinators have already found the Extranet to be the one-stop website to find contacts, state profiles, plans, documents, links, events and training related to the AMBER Alert. For more information contact Bonnie Lane at lane@fvtc.edu, or if you have any suggestions or comments for the Extranet.

AMBER Day, continued from page 1

Hawaii, New Mexico, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington and West Virginia all signed proclamations for commemorating National AMBER Alert Awareness Day.

PSA The "Voice of the New England Patriots" Gil Santos voiced a public service announcement about AMBER Alerts that ran during the playoffs. Illinois also launched a radio public service announcement.

SIGNS Arkansas announced it is



using wireless technology to send AMBER Alerts to electronic highway signs and commercial billboards. Ohio will also send the alerts to all electronic billboards. Connecticut and Florida posted AMBER Alert Awareness Day messages on their highway signs. Florida, Massachusetts and Ohio also placed messages on billboards.

SPORTS The New England Patriots and Massachusetts State Police teamed up to put an AMBER Alert message on the giant electronic scoreboard during their first home playoff game.

The Nashville Predators went all out for AMBER Alerts during their NHL

hockey game. They put a message on their electronic scoreboard, honored the mother of a missing child, set up a child safety booth and sent e-mails about AMBER Alerts to all season ticket holders and corporate sponsors.

TESTS Hawaii and Utah tested their AMBER Alert Plans to make sure all alerts go out quickly and effectively.

TRIBAL Each of the Tribal pilot sites held AMBER Alert Awareness activities at local Boys & Girls Clubs and announced a poster contest with a Native American theme. Tribal leaders also made proclamations and held traditional ceremonies.

WIRELESS Numerous states, including: Arkansas, Idaho, Louisiana, North Dakota, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas and West Virginia used the day to encourage people to sign up for wireless AMBER Alerts.

MEDIA In addition to the states already mentioned, California, Delaware, District of Columbia, Kentucky, New Jersey, North Carolina and South Dakota sent out e-mail messages, press releases and/or held press conferences to help educate the public about AMBER Alerts.

