

THE AMBER ADVOCATE

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SAVE THE DATE FOR NATIONAL AMBER ALERT CONFERENCE:
The 2009 National AMBER Alert Conference has been scheduled for October 27-29 in Tampa, Florida.



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South Border



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Family Roundtable



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Family Roundtable



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Family Roundtable

Inside This Issue:
AMBER Alert Day
AMBER International
& Family Roundtable Report



ADDITIONAL AMBER ALERT DAY HIGHLIGHTS

- The Department of Justice used the day to raise awareness about the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs). The system has a database for missing persons and unidentified remains and is available to law enforcement and the public at www.namus.gov.
- The Lt. Governor in New Mexico used National AMBER Alert Day to announce a 25 percent reduction in sexual crimes against children during the past year.
- Washington Governor Chris Gregoire declared Jan. 13 as AMBER Alert Day.

CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN CONFERENCE TO BE HELD IN DALLAS

The AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program will be sponsoring workshops at the Crimes Against Children Conference in Dallas, Texas Aug. 17-20. Law enforcement professionals are encouraged to attend. Visit cacconference.org for more information.

AMBER™ ALERT LETTERS

Recently, a group of members from the AMBER Alert Program in Manitoba, Canada, had the good fortune to be accepted to attend your Child Abduction Response Training course in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The course content was very relevant and with the personal knowledge and experiences of the presenters this greatly enhanced and added to the learning atmosphere. Our team walked away better informed and equipped to perform our respective roles in this important investigative area.

Loren Schinkel,
Manitoba AMBER Alert Coordinator

AMBER ALERT DAY CELEBRATED ACROSS THE NATION

They remembered Amber Hagerman in governor's offices, police stations and museums. National AMBER Alert Day is held each year on Jan. 13, the anniversary of Amber's 1996 kidnapping and now a day to recognize the tremendous child abduction alert plan that was developed since that tragic day.

Some states issued press releases or proclamations and announced the Missing Children Poster Contest. Other states took different approaches to get the word out about AMBER Alerts.

MASSACHUSETTS

Massachusetts hosted a child safety fair at Patriot Place, a museum for the New England Patriots. Police officers, cheerleaders and the mascot for the New England Patriots welcomed families to the event.

"Parents have to talk to their children about safety issues," said Trooper Nicole Morrell, the Massachusetts AMBER Alert Coordinator. "It's not anything to scare a child and that's not the reason for this. We want to prevent something from happening and it's important that we take these measures now."

Parents of more than 400 children were able to get free electronic child identification kits. The kits include the child's name; age; height; weight; home address; digital photo and full set of fingerprints. All of the information is bundled on a portable storage device that can conveniently be attached to a key ring.

UTAH

More than one-half million child identification kits are being distributed to students in Utah. The Utah Attorney General's Office, Utah Department of Public Safety, American Football Coaches Association and the Utah Sheriffs' Association announced the statewide effort on National AMBER Alert Day.

"Parents should realize these kits are like an insurance policy you hope you never use," said Ed Smart, father of abduction survivor Elizabeth Smart.

Utah also tested its AMBER Alert Plan and held a one-day training for more than 250 federal, state and local officers on the Child Abduction Response Team (CART) Program.

CALIFORNIA

The San Diego Sheriff's Department used National AMBER Alert Day to unveil a new regional toll-free number designed to make it easier to report tips about abducted children. The public can now call (877) 3KIDSAFE and their information will go directly to the law enforcement jurisdiction in the county handling the kidnapping.

"When the eyes and ears of the community are looking for a child, we have a better ability to recover that child safely," said Sgt. Mark O'Connor, the San Diego Sheriff's AMBER Alert Coordinator.

As officials were announcing the new phone number, an AMBER Alert was issued for a girl abducted in San Jose. The man who took the child dropped her off unharmed after seeing the alert on a transportation sign.

KANSAS

In honor of National AMBER Alert Day, Kansas Attorney General Steve Six and the Kansas AMBER Alert Task Force released two television and two radio public service announcements (PSA's). One PSA encourages the public to sign up for wireless alerts and one provides the AMBER Alert criteria.

"It is important the public know and understand the criteria for an AMBER Alert to be issued," said Six.

Radio and television stations are being encouraged to share the PSA's with their viewers. ☺

FAMILY ROUNDTABLE PROVIDES HEALING AND DIRECTION FOR CHILD ABDUCTION CASES

This was a different kind of family reunion. The Family Roundtable held in Washington, D.C. brought together families of child abduction victims from all over the nation. Some families had a child who came home and some did not. Some families located the remains of their child but others still have no idea what happened.

A total of 28 child abduction victims and family members gathered on Feb. 16 and 17 for the fifth Family Roundtable sponsored by the Department of Justice. The roundtable meetings have become an important tool to learn firsthand from families what works best when a child is abducted.

Previous roundtable meetings included personal stories from victims and family members. This meeting was the first to use a timeline to mark and discuss each milestone a family experiences during a child abduction: from the initial call to the first police response to the final court appeal. Participants were divided into groups based on the outcome of their cases, i.e. recovered alive, recovered deceased or still missing.

"The feedback we got from the different groups was dramatically different. Their issues were different," said Phil Keith, AMBER Alert Program Director for Fox Valley Technical College. "We learned things we did not know before and filled in some gaps."

Keith said he was surprised by a comment made by a sibling of an abducted child. "Not only did we lose our sibling, we lost our parents," quoted Keith. Some parents divided their duties so one parent was always taking care of the needs of the other children.

Organizers hope to create something more substantive rather than anecdotal to help law enforcement handle child abduction cases each step of the way.

Linda Walker, the mother of kidnap victim Dru Sjodin was grateful so many families were asked to participate in the discussion. "These people are such a wealth of information that it would be a shame not to tap into it," said Walker. "They were open to listen to us and I received renewed strength and hope about what they are planning to do."

On Nov. 22, 2003, Sjodin was leaving the mall in Grand Forks, N. D. and talking on the cell phone with her boyfriend. Her final words on the phone were "Okay, okay" and then "Oh my God." Five months later the 22-year-old student's body was found in a deep snow drift in Crookston, Minn.

"We were fortunate to have a community to wrap their arms around us," said Walker. "We were treated extremely well but that is not the case for every family."

The parents of Lindsey Ryan said their family was not treated well. Their 14-year-old daughter went willingly with a 56-year-old convicted murderer from her home in Jones, Mich. They were found 23 days later in Sacramento, Calif. Authorities kept the victim for another four and one-half months because they did not understand why a young girl would go away with an older man.

"She was terribly mistreated by a system that is not prepared to deal with compliant victims," said Carol Ryan, Lindsey's mother. "She was re-victimized by the judicial system."

But Ryan believes these discussions will help end the misunderstandings. "It's the systematic lack of knowledge," she said. "These roundtables are going to change that."

The Department of Justice plans to hold the next Family Roundtable at the National AMBER Alert Conference in October. ☺



Linda Walker, mother of kidnap victim Dru Sjodin



Carol Ryan, mother of kidnap victim Lindsey Ryan

GIANT AMBER ALERT SIGN GOES UP IN CALIFORNIA

AMBER Alerts are going big; very big in Garden Grove, Calif. The city has put up two 27-foot AMBER Alert signs along two major thoroughfares. The signs were funded by a \$2.5 million state and federal grant. The money also paid for five miles of fiber optics and traffic cameras.

WASHINGTON LEGISLATORS WORKING ON ALERTS FOR NON-AMBER CASES

The State of Washington may soon have an alert system for missing elderly, disabled or other vulnerable persons. Washington legislators are considering a bill that would inform law enforcement and the public in cases that do not meet the AMBER Alert criteria. Lawmakers are working with law enforcement and broadcasters to make sure the new alert does not dilute the effectiveness of the AMBER Alert.

AMBER ALERTS BY THE NUMBERS IN 2008

The number of AMBER Alerts are going down and the child abduction alerts continue to save lives. In 2008 the alerts were directly responsible for bringing 54 children home safely. A total of 194 alerts were issued for 256 children in 2008. This compares to 227 AMBER Alerts issued in 2007. The statistics were compiled by the Special Analysis Unit at the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.

The top three states for issuing alerts in 2008 were:

- Michigan 25 alerts
- Texas 23 alerts
- California 22 alerts

No AMBER Alerts were issued in 2008 in Alaska, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island or South Dakota. Alerts were also not issued in American Samoa, Guam or the Northern Marianas Islands.

SOME OTHER IMPORTANT STATISTICS:

- 52 percent of the children were recovered within four hours of NCIC entry
- 58 percent of the victims were girls and 42 percent were boys
- Ten cases (5 percent of all cases) were later determined to be hoaxes
- Eight children were found deceased

The success stories also provide a sense of how children are being saved:

- 13 children were recovered after the abductor heard the alert and released the child
- 16 children were saved after someone recognized a child from an alert
- 15 children were recovered after someone recognized a vehicle from an alert

The other nine children were found after individuals came forward with information, law enforcement received tips or the abductor told law enforcement where to find the child after an alert was issued.

PROFILE: Rachel Mathieu

THE FACE BEHIND AMBER ALERT SUCCESS STORIES

Rachel Mathieu knows there is safety in numbers. She knows the number of AMBER Alerts, the number of children saved and numbers that will help make sure children return home safe in the future. Mathieu is the AMBER Alert Analyst for the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) and collects information on every AMBER Alert.

"I like providing information to AMBER Alert Coordinators so they can take the next steps to improve their programs and gain more insight about what is happening nationwide," added Mathieu.

Since 2005 she has generated monthly, quarterly and annual reports on all AMBER related data. Mathieu finds out the age, race and sex of each missing child. She also tracks the time it takes to recover the child.

"The AMBER Alert system is improving," said Mathieu. "The data indicate the recovery time after an AMBER Alert is issued is getting quicker and the data also indicate fewer AMBER Alerts are being issued each year."

From all of the numbers and all of the reports Mathieu has noticed some trends:

- More abductors are hearing the alert and releasing the child unharmed.
- More law enforcement officers

and individuals are recognizing the vehicle of the suspect.

- More alerts are being issued for minority children.

Mathieu relies on AMBER Alert Coordinators and other partners to

make sure the statistics are accurate and meaningful. She is grateful when she is able to collect as much information as possible, as soon as possible.

What started as a temporary job with NCMEC has become a

full-time passion

for Mathieu. She began her career at NCMEC helping in the efforts to reunite children and their parents during Hurricane Katrina. She then started searching state sexual offender registries to see if offenders were involved in AMBER Alert cases.

Mathieu also brings an international perspective to NCMEC. She has lived in Japan, Senegal and Brazil, speaks Portuguese fluently, and can keep up with conversations in French, Haitian, Creole, Spanish and Italian. She is also the step-mother of a 9-year-old girl and a 14-year-old boy—a fact that helps remind her that working on the AMBER Alert is very important.

"Even though my job is with statistics, it is a piece of the puzzle to help the cause of finding missing children," said Mathieu. ☺



Rachel Mathieu,
NCMEC AMBER Alert Analyst

ON THE FRONT LINES: International

NETHERLANDS ISSUES FIRST AMBER ALERT

The Netherlands issued its first AMBER Alert less than three months after the Dutch child abduction plan was initiated.

On Feb. 14 at 1 p.m., a child care provider reported that a four-year-old boy with a rare disease was missing in a busy market in downtown Rotterdam. The National Police decided to issue an alert after local police conducted a search, considered the boy's age and eliminated other possibilities.

"We knew that this was going to be the first case," said Carlo Schippers, Dutch National Police Superintendent. Schippers had denied seven other requests since the Dutch AMBER Alert Plan was launched on Nov. 11, 2008.

The alert was issued at 4 p.m., about 25 minutes after the request had been made. Schippers said the largest national newspaper and main television stations responded quickly.

About 50 minutes after the alert was issued, the boy was found at a McDonald's restaurant not far from where he was last seen. McDonald's employees saw an online newspaper message about the alert on a large screen inside the restaurant. The boy had apparently wandered into the restaurant, took off his jacket and shoes and went into the play area. Police did not recognize him the first time they checked the restaurant because he was not wearing his jacket.

"Obviously we're most happy that our four-year-old was found alive and well," added Schippers. "All that could have made his little excursion better was to have had money to buy himself a Happy Meal."

The Dutch system is based on the American AMBER Alert program and can send alerts by television, radio, electronic signs, pop-up notices on computers, RSS newsfeeds, e-mail, text message and instant messaging. The AMBER Advocate reported in the last issue that Schippers gleaned many ideas at the recent National AMBER Alert Conference in Orange County, Calif.

Schippers said he learned even more from the first alert. He found out the text message alerts were delayed for people who signed up to receive the messages on their cell phones. More than 120,000 people have registered to receive the alerts in different electronic formats. The company that sends the text message alerts immediately made changes so the computer server functions properly next time. The National Missing Persons Bureau will also have more than one person on call to help issue alerts.

"Having this case as our first one gave us the opportunity to test the system," said Shippers. "Personally, I feel very content that it went so well and was received so well by the public." ☺

**AMBER
ALERT
FRONT LINES**



Kerry Hammond receives the Rachael Runyan Award from Elaine Runyan-Simmons

UTAH TRUCKER RECEIVES AWARD FOR FINDING ABDUCTED CHILD

A big rig trucker with a keen memory is being honored for helping recover a young girl after an AMBER Alert was issued in Utah. Kerry Hammond was given the Rachael Runyan Award, an honor given to Utah residents who respond and help save a child after an AMBER Alert.

On Jan. 16, Hammond was driving his 18-wheeler near the Utah-Nevada border when he heard the AMBER Alert on the radio. Ogden Police Department issued the alert for a 14-year-old girl who was believed to be traveling in a red Honda. Moments later he saw the car and called 911.

Hammond downplays his role but he does hope others will pay attention to AMBER Alerts. "I'm not a hero. I just did what I was supposed to do," said Hammond. "I know the AMBER Alert works. I'm hoping other people driving a big truck or a moped will do the same thing."

The Rachael Runyan Award is named for a three-year-old girl who was murdered in 1982 after she was abducted while playing with her brothers at a park in Sunset, Utah.

KENTUCKY STARTS GOLDEN ALERT

Kentucky is now issuing Golden Alerts for cases that do not meet the AMBER Alert criteria. State legislators passed a law on July 15 that allows a Golden Alert to be used in cases involving an elderly or disabled person who is missing. The alert goes to law enforcement and the media and has already had successful results.

NEW TELEVISION SPOTS HELP PROTECT CHILDREN ONLINE

The U.S. Department of Justice has produced four new public service announcements to educate parents about the dangers children face online. The PSA called "Know Where They Go" highlights risks for children on the Internet. The other PSA entitled "Exploiting a Minor Is a Major Offense" warns online predators of the legal consequences of abusing a child. Both PSA's can be found at www.stoponlinepredator.org. The Department also produced both spots in Spanish. The Spanish PSA's can be found at www.protegelosahora.org.

TYPES OF AMBER ALERT CASES BETWEEN 2007 & 2008

	2007	2008
Lost, Injured or Missing	25 or 11%	20 or 10%
Non-Family Abduction	94 or 41%	71 or 35%
Family Abduction	106 or 47%	100 or 53%
Endangered Runaway	2 or 1%	3 or 2%

AMBER ALERTS SPREADING ACROSS INDIAN COUNTRY

More Indian Tribes are moving quickly to get AMBER Alert plans. The Department of Justice is using 13 Tribal Nations to pilot the initiative in Indian Country, but now other Tribes want to do their part to recover abducted children. Tribal law enforcement officers and leaders took part in a special training on missing and abducted children which was held March 2-3 in Santa Fe, N.M.

"We're trying to get an AMBER Alert policy in place for the department because we never had one," said Bernard Velasquez, Law Enforcement Liaison for the Tesuque Pueblo Tribe. "We're really solid on this. We would like to get more training for our staff, especially our dispatchers."

The Tesuque Pueblo Tribe in northern New Mexico is hoping to host the next training and create a Child Abduction Response Team even though it is not part of the pilot project.

"The Tesuque Pueblo Tribe is a good example of how the AMBER

Alert program is spreading" said Jim Walters, AMBER Alert Liaison for the Indian Country Initiative. "We dealt with some of the obstacles they face and discussed what first steps they would need to take to bring AMBER Alert programs to their communities."



AMBER Alert Program Director Phil Keith added, "Creating greater understanding and response capacity is fundamental to the mission of the AMBER Alert Program, and the success we are experiencing in advancing the AMBER Alert in Indian Country underscores the interest and commitment of Tribal communities to protect and recover missing, endangered and abducted children."

The next training for Tribal leaders will be held May 4-6 in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. The training session quickly filled to capacity. Additional training sessions will be held in the future to accommodate those who would like to attend. ☺

TEXAS OFFERS LEGAL HELP FOR PARENTS OF ABDUCTED CHILDREN

Parents of abducted children have a new source for legal help in Texas. The Child Abduction Prevention Initiative (CAPI) recruits volunteer attorneys to help parents or guardians whose children have been abducted by another parent or guardian. The attorneys

would help parents with a limited income get a needed court order so law enforcement can bring their children home.

CAPI also trains attorney volunteers and identifies parents or guardians in need of help. ☺

BREAKING BORDERS: MEXICAN LAW ENFORCEMENT GET TRAINING ON THE AMBER ALERT

Federal and state law enforcement officials from Mexico met in El Paso, Tex. to see if more can be done to protect abducted children in Mexico and the U.S. Thirty people attended the Feb. 14-15 meeting between Mexican officials from four states and representatives from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), National Center for Missing & Exploited Children and staff and consultants of the AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Initiative, Fox Valley Technical College.

Organizers outlined the obstacles between the two countries: language, terminology and technology gaps. They also identified unique problems in Mexico such as more missing children, huge law enforcement workloads, and no national clearinghouse or database for missing and abducted children.

"This initiative will help to develop a greater understanding among U.S. and Mexican personnel of the issues surrounding cross-border abductions and human trafficking on the U.S.-Mexican border, while increasing cooperation and joint response and investigative capabilities," said Ron Laney, Associate Administrator for the Child Protection Division, OJJDP. "We are grateful for the level of interest and commitment shown by the participants during the meeting and look forward to increased collaboration between both countries on these critical issues."

Ciudad Juarez, a Mexican border city to El Paso, started Operation Alba in 2005 as a way to notify the public when a girl or woman was missing. Operation Alba can now also be used for the disappearance of a boy under the age of eleven. The program

sends bulletins about the missing person throughout Mexico. Discussions were held to try and overcome the differences in criteria for AMBER Alerts and Operation Alba and to answer questions about who has the authority to issue the alerts in each country.

"We worked together to develop best practices, raise awareness and learn what resources are available to enhance our response to child abduction cases," said Bob Hoever, Associate Director of Training and Outreach for the NCMEC. "I was excited and encouraged to see the level of commitment and desire to work together to bring children home on either side of the border."

"With the level of violence in Mexico and the child victimization increasing dramatically, these program implementation discussions are both timely and essential to protect children on both sides of the border," said Phil Keith, AMBER Alert Program Director.

Participants also discussed the need for more training, better partnerships with the media and transportation companies, reliable contacts in each country as well as a federal coordinator in Mexico and a cross-border AMBER Alert coordinator.

Four training sessions are planned for cross-border officials during the next nine months. "These sessions should greatly improve the working relationships between officials in both countries," added Keith. "The training will also create a greater response capacity of law enforcement and establish information sharing on critical issues related to missing, endangered and abducted children." ☺



South Border Meeting, El Paso, Texas



The meeting in El Paso was hosted by El Paso Police Department



Federal and state law enforcement officials from Mexico met in El Paso

AMBER INTERNATIONAL

FRENCH AND ENGLISH CONDUCT CHILD ABDUCTION EXERCISE

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Law enforcement officers in England and France raced against time to see how well they could respond to an international child abduction. British and French agencies took part in a scenario on Nov. 13, 2008 where a child was abducted in northern France but taken through the English Channel tunnel to England.

Here was the scenario: The French government received a tip that the abductor's car had been seen entering England. English authorities were asked to issue a Child Rescue Alert. Numerous law enforcement agencies worked together with the media and eventually the "child" and "abductor" were found in England.

"The response from all organizations involved has been commendable," said Joe Apps, Manager for the U.K. Missing Persons Bureau. "The exercise will be invaluable in developing the alert system in a much shorter timescale by addressing legal issues, informing on the primacy of the investigations and in developing coordination between the various organizations involved."

The exercise was a way to test the revised alert system, a nationally coordinated plan that can respond to international alerts. Both countries wanted to see if

their protocols, communications and coordination between the two countries were effective.

"This exercise was considered on the whole as a success by all participants," said Superintendent Frederic Malon, Chief of the Central Office for Repression of Violence in Paris. "We need other exercises to really test the international cooperation with foreign countries." Malon said he would actually like to have less preparation for future tests so they can learn better to handle the real-life problems of an actual child abduction.

Last August the European Parliament asked all of the members of the European Union to establish a standardized response to child abductions for law enforcement and the media.

All European child abduction alert plans are based on the American AMBER Alert model. The French 'Alerte Enlèvement' has been used successfully six times in two years. Greece and Belgium have child abduction alert plans and The Netherlands launched their plan on Nov. 11. (See Front Lines on page 5) Scotland is considering a regional alert and Ireland is exploring a plan that can tie into the U.K. Child Rescue Alert plan. ☺

FRENCH ABDUCTION ALERT HELPS FIND BABY

French police recovered a two-day-old baby who was taken from a maternity unit while his mother was taking a shower. On Nov. 9, authorities alerted the public about the missing boy by issuing an 'Alerte Enlèvement', the French equivalent of the AMBER Alert. Shortly after the alert went out police received a tip from a man who said his sister called to say she just gave birth to a baby. The man said his sister was never pregnant and made the connection to the alert. The woman was arrested after police found the baby at her home. ☺