

THE AMBER PLAN

Questions and Answers

What is the Amber Plan?

The Amber Plan is a cooperative effort between the West Virginia radio and television stations and law enforcement agencies. The plan calls for law enforcement agencies to provide radio and television stations with an alert upon the immediate confirmation of a child abduction. All participating radio stations will break programming to broadcast the alert and subsequent information provided by law enforcement.

Why did the West Virginia Broadcasters Association decide to implement this plan?

When contacted by the Governor's office regarding the implementation of an abduction alert program for West Virginia similar to one operating in the Dallas/Fort Worth area, it was felt the program would provide a great community service and might help save the life of a child.

How will the radio and television stations obtain the information about child abductions?

When a local law enforcement official determines an abduction has occurred, the communications center of West Virginia Department of Public Safety will be notified and provided with basic facts. DPS will confirm the accuracy of the information and issue an Amber Alert via the State Emergency Alert System (EAS).

Is our station(s) required to broadcast an Amber Alert?

No, but the success of the program depends greatly on the maximum number of people hearing the message and being on the lookout for the abductor. If a child in your community were abducted, you would certainly want the benefit of the Amber Alert Program.

What must I do to participate in the Amber Alert program through the EAS system?

Your station's endec is supposed to be programmed for all of the codes listed in the State EAS Plan. One of those codes is CEM (Civil Emergency Message). That is the event code that will be used for an Amber Alert. To participate, you must make certain your receiver is programmed to receive CEM.

When we receive an Amber Alert, what is the procedure?

The Amber Alert (CEM) will come to your station via your EAS receiver. Your receiver may be programmed for an automatic interrupt of programming or delay. If delayed, we encourage you to broadcast the alert within 15 minutes. Getting the information on the air as

soon as possible is the key factor. The most crucial time in abduction is the first one or two hours.

After receiving and broadcasting the initial Amber Alert, what should I do for follow-up?

The EAS message will be broadcast every 15 minutes the first hour and every 30 minutes the next two hours.

Will television stations receive a picture or hard copy?

Television stations will receive pictures of the victim as soon as they become available. When pictures are available, it is anticipated they will be distributed by the Internet. The Department of Public Safety will send out hard copy to television and radio stations that are on the Highway Patrol wire following the alert via EAS.

Is it important that the EAS sounder is utilized with an Amber Alert?

We think it is. As irritating as it is to many, it is an identifiable sound that will be associated with an emergency.

There are times during the day that we do not have personnel at the station. How can we broadcast an Amber Alert during those times?

Your EAS receiver is programmable to automatically interrupt your on-the-air programming. We suggest you use this process.

When will the Amber Alert program be initiated?

We anticipate the program officially getting underway before November 1, 2002. The EAS regular monthly test scheduled for (time & date) will contain a mention of the Amber Alert system, as will future monthly tests. Periodic tests will be scheduled at a future date using the CEM event code, but you will be notified in advance of these scheduled tests and they may replace your Regular Weekly Test (RWT).

What are the determining factors on utilizing the Amber Alert?

- Law enforcement confirms a child 17 years of age or younger has been abducted.
- Law enforcement believes the circumstances surrounding the abduction indicate that the child is in danger of serious bodily harm or death.
- Law enforcement has enough descriptive information about the child, abductor and suspect's vehicle to believe an immediate broadcast will facilitate the child's location.
- A law enforcement officer **must** enter the abducted child into NCIC and, in the comments section on the NCIC entry screen, **must** provide supporting documentation as to why the Amber Alert System should be activated.
- A law enforcement officer will complete a WVSP Form 167, WV Amber Alert Request Form, and fax to the WV State Police Communications Center at (304) 746-2230.

NOTE: The system will not be used for runaway or most parental abduction cases unless the circumstance is life threatening to the child.

What should be the policy of the station if a citizen calls to report an abduction?

The station should direct the person calling to their local police department.

My station is 100-150 miles away from the location of the abduction. Why should I broadcast an Amber Alert of this nature?

Your broadcast of the alert is important for a number of reasons. In the State of West Virginia, an abductor could have traveled to your area within the first two or three hours of the abduction. Other stations “down the line” that wish to participate may depend on you to receive EAS and Amber Alert information. If a child were abducted in your area, you would certainly appreciate the participation of other stations across the state.

Has there been any success with the Amber Alert program in the Dallas/Fort Worth area?

Yes. In the years since the plan has been operational, there have been cases where the abductor has released the victim after hearing the Amber Alert on the radio. In one case, a motorist heard the alert, spotted the automobile and abductor, and called 911 to report the sighting. The motorist continued to follow the vehicle until the police arrived and pulled the abductor over. It is also felt that the Amber Alert program has been a deterrent for child abduction cases.

Who can request that an Amber Alert be issued through the EAS?

Any West Virginia law enforcement agency can make the request, but must first initiate the applicable directives required of the local police or sheriff’s department.

Who may authorize an Amber Alert System activation through the Emergency Broadcast System?

The only person who may authorize activation of the EAS encoder for an Amber Alert is the State Police Troop F Commander, or his designee.

Can a parent of a missing child independently ask for activation of the Amber Alert System?

Local law enforcement agencies must first have the opportunity to gather information about a child’s disappearance and determine whether the disappearance meets the activation criteria.