



New View for AMBER

A child is reported missing every 40 seconds.

Seventy-four percent of the abducted children who are murdered are dead within 3 hours of the abduction.

Time is an abducted child's greatest enemy.

*From the AmberView website at www.amberview.org

The above statistics illustrate one of parents' greatest fears—abduction of their child. During the past 10 years, the AMBER Alert program has begun to change those statistics by serving as a key tool for locating and returning missing children to their families.

The AMBER Alert early warning system, a voluntary partnership between law enforcement agencies and the media created in 1996, provides information to the public as quickly as possible following verification that a child is missing or abducted. Time and again, AMBER Alert has proven its value by helping to return children to their families. Success, however, does not preclude improvement.

AMBER Alert presently lacks the technology to instantaneously mass broadcast a high-resolution, three-dimensional photo to law enforcement and the media within minutes of an abduction. In addition, available descriptions and photos of the missing child, key to an AMBER Alert, often are vague or outdated and reach their destinations too slowly.

To enhance AMBER Alert, a new technology called AmberView is being developed through the West Virginia High Technology Consortium (WVHTC) Foundation in Fairmont, West Virginia, in conjunction with and funded by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ). The WVHTC Foundation is a nonprofit organization focusing on the regional and statewide growth of high-tech businesses. NIJ's Office of Law Enforcement Technology Commercialization in Wheeling, West Virginia, is a member of the consortium.

"AmberView is designed to work in collaboration with State and national AMBER Alert programs," says Robert

Chico, Program Manager with WVHTC. "This new system has the ability to mass broadcast a digital image of an abducted child to law enforcement, media, and private-sector recipients via the World Wide Web within minutes of an official AMBER Alert. The high-resolution images can also be broadcast to 911 centers, media outlets, shopping malls, airport monitors, cell phones, and other

AMBER FACTS

- The AMBER Alert System began in 1996, in Texas, when Dallas-Fort Worth broadcasters teamed with local police to develop an early warning system to help find abducted children.
- AMBER stands for America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response. The name was created as a legacy to 9-year-old Amber Hagerman, who was kidnapped while riding her bicycle in Arlington, Texas, and then brutally murdered.
- Other States and communities began setting up their own AMBER plans as the idea was adopted across the Nation. However, from 1996 to 2001, development and implementation of AMBER plans throughout the country was not considered significant. At the end of 2001, only four States had statewide AMBER plans. Now, all 50 States have statewide AMBER plans in place.
- To date, more than 240 children have been successfully recovered through AMBER Alert.
- In October 2002, President Bush hosted the first-ever White House Conference on Missing, Exploited, and Runaway Children. Following the 2002 White House Conference, the Attorney General appointed the Assistant Attorney General (AAG) for the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) to serve as the national AMBER Alert Coordinator. OJP AAG Regina B. Schofield currently serves as the Coordinator.

outlets to increase the chance of locating the child by involving a larger portion of the public in the search.”

According to Chico, AmberView uses biometrics—the science of identifying individuals through physical characteristics—by taking a two-dimensional photograph and then using specialized software enhancements to create a three-dimensional avatar (image) that can be enlarged and rotated to view multiple angles.

“What results is a perfect, three-dimensional digital image,” Chico says. “The process takes only a few minutes and photos can be updated every year on school picture day. Participation in AmberView would be voluntary and require parental/guardian consent. In addition, images and biographical information would be stored in a secure database on a secure server at the WVHTC Foundation, accessible only by authorized users. Within minutes of notification, thousands of people in a broad geographical area will have accurate, up-to-date information and be on the alert to help find the missing child.”

Early last year, a pilot project involved scanning the facial images of 230 middle school students from three West Virginia counties. The project was unveiled to the media in a live, simulated, child abduction demonstration in February 2005 at the WVHTC Foundation facility. Parents, teachers, school administrators, State and local law enforcement officials, and media representatives provided input to the AmberView process, which was then forwarded to NIJ.

“The pilot experienced no roadblocks and received much cooperation and enthusiasm from parents, schools, and children,” Chico says. “Schools opened their doors to allow the image captures. Law enforcement officials embraced the program and fully backed the launch of the pilot as evidenced by their active participation, attendance, and positive comments. The pilot’s success is a direct result of the hard work and the cooperation of academia, law enforcement, and the media who joined forces to return a child to the safety of its family.”

Actual implementation of AmberView within West Virginia began in August 2005. This included development of

the AmberView website and establishment of the secure image repository at the WVHTC Foundation. Repository access, Chico notes, is restricted to the State AMBER Alert coordinator. “This next phase of AmberView is expected to take approximately 15 months to complete,” he says, “and we plan to expand the system throughout the Nation in future phases.”

For more information about AmberView, contact Robert Chico at the WVHTC Foundation, 304-366-2577 or rlchico@wvhtf.org, or visit www.amberview.org. More information about AMBER Alert can be accessed at www.amberalert.gov. For information on the WVHTC Foundation, visit www.wvhtf.org.

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