

Second National Conference on AMBER Alert Conference Proceedings Report

Background and Overview

In 2002, Attorney General John Ashcroft designated Deborah J. Daniels to serve as the National AMBER Alert Coordinator for the Department of Justice (DOJ) and in doing so, charged her with responsibility for creating, expanding, and coordinating local, State, and regional AMBER Alert plans across the country. Since that time, DOJ has accomplished a number of significant tasks in support of this mission:

- Established statewide AMBER Alert plans in 49 States.
- Identified the characteristics and trends of AMBER Alert programs nationwide, as well as the procedures used by them.
- Developed an implementation plan to track, monitor, and report on national AMBER Alert progress and changes.
- Developed recommendations for the criteria to be used to issue an AMBER Alert.
- Developed technology standards to promote cooperation among State communications systems.
- Created local, State, and Federal partnerships and promoted agreements among States and communities to develop a seamless communication network.
- Created a mechanism for secondary distribution of AMBER Alerts through agreements involving the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) and nationally known communication companies.
- Worked with the FBI to improve use of the existing Child Abduction flag and create a new AMBER Alert flag within the National Crime Information Center.
- Provided training to law enforcement personnel, broadcasters, and transportation representatives through regional summits and missing children training courses.
- Integrated information on AMBER Alert into existing training programs and publications and initiated new training programs to improve the recovery of missing children.
- Developed and disseminated a series of three public service announcements to educate the public about the AMBER Alert program.
- Established a national AMBER Alert Web site (www.amberalert.gov) to raise public awareness.
- Created a database of State and Federal laws related to AMBER Alert and missing children.
- Developed “best practice” guides for law enforcement, broadcast and media outlets; and a brochure for the public.
- Developed an AMBER Alert “toolkit” to commemorate National Missing Children’s Day.
- Publicized the Department of Transportation’s “best practice” report on messaging on DOJ’s AMBER Alert Web site.
- Attended more than 40 professional conferences and organized information and training sessions for broadcasters, law enforcement officials, and juvenile justice personnel to

educate these AMBER Alert partners and constituents on effective strategies for collaboration and cooperation.

In addition to these activities, a series of conferences was convened to share knowledge and increase skills and capabilities leading to the safe recovery of missing children:

- In August 2003, the first National Training Conference on AMBER Alert brought together teams from every State to receive training, develop State and local AMBER Alert plans, and share best practices.
- In December 2003, the first AMBER Alert Technology Conference provided 65 AMBER coordinators with an opportunity to meet personally with representatives from a number of public and private organizations and companies to learn firsthand about the new technologies being developed to enhance AMBER communications.
- In February 2004, DOJ met with national and State broadcast and media representatives to solicit their advice on ways to expand and enhance the AMBER Alert system.
- In June 2004, DOJ and NCMC cosponsored the first Southeast Conference on Missing and Exploited Children.
- On September 8-10, 2004, the second National Training Conference on AMBER Alert was held in Columbus, Ohio, to share best practices and discuss overall strategy with representatives from all 50 States plus the District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands.¹

This report provides a complete summary of the September 2004 conference, including its goals, objectives, outcomes, and results; as well as highlights from the working group breakout sessions. A list of participants can be found in attachment A, while the conference agenda can be found in attachment B.

Conference Goals

The goals of the conference were:

- To increase cooperation and opportunities for networking among AMBER Alert programs.
- To increase knowledge about “what works” in AMBER Alert programs.
- To enhance the overall AMBER Alert network by providing suggestions for greater communication and collaboration.
- To identify issues related to AMBER Alert program development and implementation as well as effective ways to address such issues.

¹ Only representatives from Puerto Rico were unable to attend the conference.

- To provide information on strategies for recovering missing children, including child recovery plans and legal remedies.
- To detail methods and strategies that will improve the dissemination of AMBER Alert information.

Conference Design

The 3-day conference was designed for AMBER Alert Plan teams from each State, region, territory, and locality, led by the AMBER Plan coordinator. Teams included partners from the media and broadcast industries, transportation officials, the local law enforcement representative responsible for implementing the AMBER Alert Plan in his or her jurisdiction, and a missing children clearinghouse manager. In all, 253 AMBER Alert representatives attended the conference.

The conference format included both lectures and working group sessions. The lecture portion of the agenda was aimed at providing information about “what works” for AMBER Alert programs, including specifics on partner involvement, program enhancements since the first national conference in 2003, and resources to improve the recovery of missing children. The facilitated working group sessions were designed to identify problems, issues, and best practices by discipline and to provide an opportunity for AMBER Alert teams to discuss these issues and share best practices with other teams from their region.

Conference Results

Of the 253 conference participants, 231 (91%) completed the evaluation form. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that the conference was extremely successful in achieving its goals (listed earlier in this report) and that each of the presentations and breakout sessions provided valuable information that will benefit individual agencies and AMBER Alert teams. The conference received a score of 4.21 or more (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest) for achieving each of its overall goals.

Participants had a number of suggestions for future conferences and seminars:

- Increased use of regional breakout sessions generally.
- Additional time for question-and-answer periods.
- Incorporation of a two-track system into conferences and seminars, one for “seasoned” partners, another for new partners.
- Use of parallel tracks for each discipline.
- Special breakout sessions for border States with a focus on international issues.
- Special breakout sessions that focus on rural versus urban community issues.
- More information on 911 phone calls and phone bank issues, specifically, what works and ways to improve communication between law enforcement and the media.
- Discussion of 511.
- Limitations of the Department of Transportation.

- Creation of national standards.
- Greater emphasis on interstate coordination issues.
- Distribution of individual State resource and training materials (perhaps through a display).
- Greater discussion of State laws and their impact.
- Information on vendors, including which AMBER Alert programs use which vendors and how the different technologies are rated.
- Real-life scenarios that demonstrate how to handle an AMBER Alert from initial call through the investigation.
- How to work with families and the public when an AMBER Alert is denied.
- Greater focus on parental abductions.
- Specific advice on how to develop a memorandum of understanding.
- Greater discussion of secondary distribution systems.
- Greater discussion of public relations issues.
- Training for public information officers.
- Training for NCIC operators.

Conference participants also identified a number of specific issues for future training and technical assistance. Law enforcement personnel expressed a need for information on 911 phone calls, dispatcher operations, and phone banks. They also expressed a need for dispatcher training, NCIC training, training on international issues, and assistance in developing child recovery plans. Regional meetings were viewed as an important vehicle for addressing many of these issues.

Media and broadcast partners pointed out that an AMBER Alert checklist would help members of their profession understand exactly what to do when an AMBER Alert is issued. They also requested assistance in improving the EAS system and publication of a best practices guide specifically for the media.

Transportation partners identified the need to standardize signage language, increase training opportunities on technical development issues, and expand the use of changeable message signs.

Finally, State clearinghouse managers suggested additional training for law enforcement and expansion of the role of nonprofit organizations in the AMBER Alert program.

Next Steps

The National Conference continues to be one of the main strategies for expanding and improving the AMBER Alert network nationwide. In the coming months, a number of additional action steps will be undertaken to address specific concerns raised by participants at the national conference. Some participants will be tapped as volunteers to aid in the completion of some tasks.

- Two “best practice” guides—one for the media and one for law enforcement—will be finalized and disseminated to help develop more effective AMBER Alert programs and improve collaboration and coordination among program partners.
- A model Child Recovery Plan will be developed and disseminated to law enforcement agencies nationwide to improve the recovery of all missing children.
- An NCIC fact sheet and pocket card will be developed and disseminated to educate law enforcement personnel and terminal operators on the proper procedures for entering missing children into the NCIC system.
- A formal evaluation strategy will be developed and implemented to assess AMBER Alert process and performance outcomes.
- An Honor Roll system will be developed to identify and document AMBER Alert programs that demonstrate the use of best practices.
- Regional work sessions will be held to improve collaboration among AMBER Alert programs and to enhance the overall performance of programs nationwide. The regional sessions will include representatives from Canada and Mexico to improve cooperation across borders.
- Additional training programs will be developed to address issues identified by AMBER Alert partners.

Breakout Session Summary: Problems and Issues

Participants were divided into breakout groups by discipline to discuss their particular needs and problems. Points raised in the discussion were recorded on flipcharts and are summarized below.

AMBER Plan Coordinators

- Ongoing training is needed because of the constant changeover in personnel.
 - Make sure everyone in the process understands the criteria, including:
 - Local law enforcement.
 - The media (educate, do not develop a national plan).
 - AMBER Alert coordinator.
 - General public.
 - Create a budget for materials and ongoing training.
 - Develop a roll-call video, training drills, and train-the-trainer sessions.
 - Institute training on other tools to be used in instances in which AMBER Alert criteria are not met.

- There is not enough time to do all that needs to be done, especially if the AMBER coordinator has more than one job responsibility.
 - Some coordinators are not even involved in missing children issues!
 - Coordinators hear great ideas at conferences, but do not have enough time to fully implement them when they get back home. Coordinators would like to make their plans truly awesome, but must fulfill other duties within their agencies as well.

- There is a need for Interstate MOUs.
 - Concerns about distinct differences among regional plans.
 - Need for courtesy calls when a State or jurisdiction activates in a neighboring State or jurisdiction's broadcast area (even if no interstate activation is being requested).
 - Need for formal interjurisdictional agreements.
 - Particularly a problem for those States where a person can travel into and out of the State within a few hours.

- There are concerns about the amount of time it takes to issue an alert:
 - Between 15 and 45 minutes was the average.
 - Can be time consuming.

- Internal communications are not sufficiently getting the word out within local agencies.
- Phone Banks.
 - Absence of phone banks.
 - Lack of resources.
 - Telephone line may not be taped for intake of tips.
 - Smaller agencies may not have the resources to man a phone bank.
- The EAS system is antiquated.
- The benefits of an after-action review may be overlooked.
- The importance of insuring that the AA flag is only be activated when authorized by the AMBER coordinator.
- Secondary vendors often push out/disseminate the wrong information.
- Inability to control the information flow and authenticity after initial activation.
- Implementation criteria:
 - Need for consistent implementation of criteria.
 - Need to adhere to geographic boundaries of alerts.
 - Need for intrastate coordination.
 - Need for flexibility of criteria.
 - Need to define imminent danger.
 - Need to recognize multiple responsibilities of the AMBER coordinator.
- Exploding technology: there is no guidance and no evaluation of new technology.
- There is confusion about the type of plans (State, local, or regional), their location, and how many exist.
- Political influence can affect proper activation.
- What is a legitimate test of the AMBER Alert system and how extensive should it be (e.g., fax, EAS, etc.)?
- What is the role of the clearinghouse? How does it track its numbers?
- Good, reliable contact information on a 24/7 basis is needed for all coordinators in one central location. This also includes information about program criteria and emergency numbers.

Local Law Enforcement

- ☑ Training is needed regarding criteria, protocols, and activators.
- ☑ Technology:
 - How well do we understand it? What is its purpose and who has control over it?
 - Funding is needed to update technology equipment and training.
 - Need to go back to basic police work and let IT people handle technology.
- ☑ EAS is not being attended 24 hours and is outdated.
- ☑ There are limited personnel, particularly within small agencies, for phone banks.
- ☑ Need to determine who will manage and conduct an unbiased after-action review.
- ☑ There is no incentive for an individual or agency to be part of the team.
- ☑ There are jurisdictional boundary issues and concerns.
- ☑ Agencies fail to properly enter information into NCIC.
- ☑ There is no followup for refusal to activate an alert.
- ☑ Public education is lacking.
- ☑ Regional coordination needs to be improved.
- ☑ The National MOU has not been signed by all States.
- ☑ There is an absence of detailed MOUs and standard operating procedures.
- ☑ Turnover, particularly in law enforcement and among journalists, makes consistency problematic.
- ☑ What are the policies and parameters for secondary alert pushouts? Should they be based on time? Boundaries?
- ☑ Many agencies do not have a recovery plan or response protocol.
- ☑ Cultural issues affect alerts (e.g., what is the definition of “imminent danger”?).
- ☑ Hawaii and Alaska face unique issues because of their isolation.
- ☑ There is a need for greater and a common language with media.

- There needs to be a timely update of Web sites.
- A liaison should be assigned to the family of a missing child.

Broadcasters

- There is a lack of education and community awareness about AMBER Alerts.
- Training is needed for all constituent groups, including law enforcement and government officials in how to work with broadcasters.
- There is a need for better understanding of AMBER Alert criteria.
- Broadcasters need greater education (through such mechanisms as the Poynter Institute for media training, Washington News Lab, RTNDA, association meetings).
- First responders are not clear on how to interact with broadcasters.
- The EAS system is antiquated in all facets. Some EAS systems have poor quality automated voice capability
- There are no funds for implementation of AMBER Alert. Homeland security is going to be funding media training in 25 major markets. There is no funding for equipment, which limits communication capabilities, daisy chain reduces quality of audio.
- Testing causes problems: what can you test and when?
- Penalties should be increased for false reporting.
- How does a busy newsroom distinguish between what constitutes an AMBER Alert and a news story?
- There is insufficient recognition of the voluntary nature of broadcaster involvement in AMBER Alert.
- Communication among news staffs is problematic because faxes go to the wrong desk.
- There are vast geographic regions covered by NOAA.
- There is a general lack of understanding of statewide AMBER Alert criteria.
 - Should the criteria be uniform in a State?
 - Who is responsible for funding training?
- Broadcasters need immunity from liability.

- ☑ What is a “missing child alert”; a “near”, “short”, “non” AMBER Alert; and how should broadcasters and law enforcement deal with each category?
- ☑ Alternate language broadcasts are needed.
- ☑ Nonattended radio stations make it hard to issue an alert.
- ☑ FCC rulemaking to totally change the architecture for EAS creates uncertainty and a problem by possible mandatory access to stations for emergency purposes.
- ☑ What is the role of the cable industry.
- ☑ Law enforcement, especially small departments, lack trained personnel, particularly on the technology.
- ☑ There are problems with testing the systems.
- ☑ Various entities are attempting to make money off the AMBER Alert program.
- ☑ There is a tendency to cover the same material rather than build on past conferences (e.g., interstate compacts and MOUs).
- ☑ Terminology differs between broadcasters and law enforcement. For example, broadcasters use the term “gatekeeper” to describe the activator of an alert.
- ☑ There is confusion of AMBER Alert code with national anti-terrorist alert.

Transportation

- ☑ There are concerns about the time it takes law enforcement to get AMBER Alert information to transportation:
 - More training is needed for law enforcement.
 - Law enforcement agencies don’t communicate with one another.
- ☑ There are inconsistent practices and procedures for putting messages out on the boards. Law enforcement may bypass the chain of command. Many States have more than one law enforcement agency responsible for issuing an alert, and often they do not follow the same procedures.
- ☑ Non-law enforcement agencies (e.g., the media) call saying an AMBER Alert has been issued, why aren’t signs being used?
- ☑ If the media overrule/reject the issuing agency and downgrade the situation to a news story, the Department of Transportation is left wondering what to do.

- ☑ The Department of Transportation gets flooded with information and has to sort through it all to determine what to broadcast to personnel and on message boards.
- ☑ The lack of training and exercises creates confusion.
- ☑ There are not enough variable message signs (VMS).
- ☑ VMS are not necessarily in the best locations for AMBER purposes (based on traffic flow needs). Portable signs may be in use for other purposes or may not be the type of signs needed. Also, it can take up to 4 hours to confirm that the message made it to all VMS signs and to verify its accuracy.
- ☑ The Federal Government does not require State Departments of Transportation to come into compliance with AMBER recommendations and does not fund these mandates.
- ☑ There are intra- and interagency turf issues regarding program implementation.
- ☑ Roles and responsibilities within each agency need to be clearly defined, and all parties need to understand how they relate to one another.
- ☑ Many Departments of Transportation have thousands of employees, yet the AMBER message isn't communicated internally so their personnel don't know to look for vehicles.
- ☑ Regular training is needed because alerts don't occur frequently but the consequences are huge when they do.
- ☑ There needs to be a central point of contact within law enforcement for all agencies to communicate with.
- ☑ After-action briefings should be conducted to identify and resolve problems before the next AMBER Alert.
- ☑ The lack of resources means that the public's expectations cannot be met.
- ☑ There are inconsistent processes regarding local, Statewide, or regional AMBER Alerts, particularly in terms of the length of time between events varies.
- ☑ The Department of Transportation has many issues to contend with: maintenance, power, phone line, cell technology, and vandalism.
- ☑ Broadcasts from radio stations in-State may actually come from another State.
- ☑ Clear channel national broadcasts and satellite broadcasts create a problem.

- ☑ The Department of Transportation receives complaints that it is causing traffic congestion because drivers slow down to read signs.
- ☑ There are questions about whether active or passive 511 calls should put AMBER on a prerecorded message.
- ☑ What should be broadcast on highway advisory radio (HAR) and for how long?
- ☑ There need to be national standards for message sets using VMS, 511, HAR.
- ☑ There are limitations on character sets/number of fields for signage.

State Clearinghouse Managers

- ☑ Program development:
 - Is the role formal, defined, and written, or is there an absence of structure?
 - Criteria vary and there is a lack of single point of contact.
 - Stakeholders are not committed or involved – some are not interested.
 - AMBER Alert became a political agenda.
 - Some AMBER coordinators are not affiliated with the government.
 - Clearinghouses are left out of the program.
 - Changes in personnel affect level of expertise; continual training is needed to ensure continuity within the program.
 - Need to institutionalize.
 - Funding.
- ☑ Program implementation:
 - Training is needed for local law enforcement and other stakeholders.
 - MOUs need to be created, as well as written plans.
 - Agencies do not have child recovery plans.
 - There is limited clearinghouse staff.
 - Plans were put together without adequate planning and development.
 - Attention needs to focus on communicating alerts to persons with disabilities (such as the blind or hearing impaired) or with language barriers.
 - Regular meetings should be held for stakeholders.
 - Border notifications should be formalized with Canada and Mexico.
- ☑ Issuance of AMBER Alerts:
 - Plans should be tested regularly.
 - After-action reviews should be conducted regularly:
 - Originating agency needs to attend.
 - Denials need to be reviewed.
 - Reviews currently are too informal.
 - Who is responsible for alert notification?

- ☑ Interstate collaboration and communication needs to improve, including the development of a 24/7 contact list for all 50 States. Territorial issues exist among plans at the city, State, and regional levels.
- ☑ Community awareness needs to be improved through training, education, and public awareness PSAs.
- ☑ Technology:
 - There are problems with portals.
 - There is unauthorized secondary distribution, particularly dissemination of alerts beyond what was originally intended.
 - National initiatives may not function locally.
 - There is a lack of information about and evaluation of providers.
 - For-profit organizations are jumping on the AMBER Alert name.
 - There is a need for 511 technology.
 - Due to technology, the public may be more informed than law enforcement.
- ☑ The 160-character limitation for information.
- ☑ Clearinghouses are underutilized. They have institutional knowledge of missing children issues that some AMBER teams are not taking advantage of.
- ☑ Other Issues
 - There is a lack of reunification plans as part of child recovery.
 - There is a lack of respect for the reunification process.

Breakout Session Summary: What Works

AMBER Alert teams were divided into regional groups to discuss “what works” in their programs. Discussion points identified in the previous breakout session served as a guide for the groups.

People Issues

- Team cooperation and trust
 - Assign a single point of contact for all agencies and get signed MOUs in place.
 - Make use of existing countywide mutual aid compacts to serve as a baseline local MOU.
 - Hold regular meetings to develop relationships.
 - Rotate the location of regular monthly meetings to improve understanding of all AMBER team partner functions.
 - Instill real belief in AMBER Alert among team members.
 - Share experiences.
 - Working the dynamic process.
 - Have the clearinghouse and coordinator work side by side in the same office if possible.
 - The format of the national and regional conferences helps to motivate team members and develop the resolve to meet regularly.

- DOT partners
 - Reinforce DOT partnership/committee position.
 - Take advantage of DOT resources.
 - Use secondary technology (e.g., emails and faxes) to get information to DOT more quickly.

- State clearinghouse partners
 - Involve as part of the stakeholder committee.
 - Ensure that clearinghouse staff are notified. (After the urgency of the AMBER, it is still a missing child case.)
 - Use clearinghouse to monitor the alert and provide technical and analytical support.
 - Post to their web sites.
 - Assist in maintaining statistics.
 - Provide training.
 - Provide support to victim families.
 - Serve as public information officer.

- Stakeholders
 - Provide regular reassurances and updates and make regular presentations at their meetings.

- Broadcasters.
 - National Weather Service.
 - Departments of transportation.
 - Law enforcement.
 - NOAA.
 - Emergency Alert System.
 - Associations of police chiefs and sheriffs.
 - Governor's office.
 - Public safety communications center.
 - Public radio network.
 - Nonprofit organizations.
- Turf wars, partner distrust, and political interference
- Pull stakeholders together and meet with State and local law enforcement.
 - Law enforcement public information officer should have a close relationship with the media.
 - Ask media executives what they want to see with the alert - make them part of the process.
 - Put broadcasters' representative on the review committee.
 - Have a plan in place, then follow the plan and the criteria.
- Interstate jurisdictional issues
- Activating agency should make courtesy calls to surrounding State agencies by telephone because of the overlap in broadcast regions (e.g., radio and television coverage).
 - Working collectively with neighboring States can enhance reporting through "floodgate messaging" and linked Web site messaging to broadcast AMBER information more quickly and simultaneously.
 - Regional AMBER summits with contacts from nearby States can help to facilitate networking by putting faces with names.
 - An interstate MOU can help to resolve inconsistent practices.
 - An interstate compact (like the Emergency Management Assistance Compact for AMBER Alert) should be created.
 - Use NLETS Message.
 - Put out alerts regardless of the MOU as long as information is verified by the State coordinator.
 - Establish automatic notification for activations in smaller States to neighboring states (for example, Rhode Island, Delaware, DC).
 - Enhance Canadian relationship through the creation of an MOU (NY already has this agreement formalized).
- Public awareness
- Broadcasters can do more public awareness when there are no activations (e.g., write news stories about this conference).

- Public awareness/community education efforts should be used to ensure that everyone understands the AMBER Alert program (use brochures, PSAs, Web sites).
- List AMBER criteria in front of phone books.

Process Issues

- Criteria considerations
 - Mental/physical disability.
 - Suspect has history of confirmed abuse and/or neglect.
 - Suspect threatens to harm child and/or self.
 - Suspect is a noncustodial parent, with no legal custody of the child.
- Timeframes and verification
 - Set up a global email to media outlets.
 - Make followup phone calls to EAS relay stations to confirm AMBER Alert was received and equipment is properly working.
- Frequency of message
 - Every 15 minutes for first 2 hours, every 30 minutes for the next 3 hours, terminate after 5 hours.
 - Every 30 minutes for first 4 hours, periodically for next 4 hours, terminate after 8 hours.
 - Every 15 minutes for first 3 hours, every 30 minutes for next 5 hours, terminate after 5 hours.
- Content of message
 - For phones:
 - Similar to Changeable Message Signs.
 - For message boards:
 - Missing Child – AMBER Alert – Vehicle info (if available).
 - AMBER Alert – Abducted Child – Tune to local media.
 - Child Abduction – Tune to your local radio station – Or specific station.
 - Child Abduction Alert – Vehicle info (if available) – Call 911.
 - AMBER Alert – Abducted Child – For info call 511.
 - For other media:
 - Posters, faxes, emails: all broadcast full text.
- Phone number to display on message
 - 1-888-58-AMBER (nationwide, rolls over to investigating agency).
 - 911.
 - 511.
 - Investigating agency number.
- Updating alerts

- Using State investigating agency liaisons at the scene with local law enforcement helps with updating information after the initial alert.
- Interagency and internal steering committees are effective tools for coordination and dissemination of AMBER updates.
- Secondary pushouts
 - Email list-serves using voluntary signup by citizens and businesses to get alerts.
 - Send alerts to all broadcasters.
 - Create “one-stop shopping” so the coordinator can focus on the AMBER Alert. One push of the button should send the message to everyone who needs or wants to be notified:
 - NCMEC.
 - Blast fax.
 - Email.
 - Web site.
 - Posters.
 - AOL.
 - Teletype.
 - Lottery.
 - Transportation.
 - Hospitals.
 - Truckers’ associations.
 - Rest areas.
 - Wireless to patrol cars.
 - Reverse 911.
 - Business alert network.
 - Broadcast to public safety officials.
 - Customs (borders).
 - Phone companies.
- AMBER Alert cancellations
 - Activating agency should be responsible for canceling the alert.
- After-action reviews
 - Truly review what went right and what went wrong and then make adjustments in the plan. Interview the activating agency during the meeting via conference call.
 - Include all partner agencies to help identify issues for the future.
 - Critique activation requests that are denied and release information to all partners.
 - Include a third party for a neutral review.
 - Use the after-action report to refine agency approaches and improve response profile.
- Coordination of AMBER

- The key to success—and the one way to potentially overcome the magnitude of the job—is communication.

Training

Standards

- There should be State training requirements and standards to meet before AMBER Alerts can be activated.
- Require 8 hours annual inservice training in missing and exploited children, with at least 1 hour dedicated to AMBER.
- Institute State police academy training specific to AMBER.
- Use academy trainings.

Local law enforcement needs to be aware of the statewide plan

- Training must be appropriate to the audience
- Use roll call, Web-based training, Training drills, and written scripts.
- Incorporate training into State sheriffs and chiefs associations
- Provide ongoing training to address turnover issue.

Training

- Use other professional associations to help with training, funding, and public awareness.
- Visit other States to review their operations and best practices.
- Receive best practice models on MOUs, forms, and so forth.
- Create different training curricula for regional, statewide plans.

Broadcaster training

- Develop a one-page placard/checklist for radio and TV stations to identify what AMBER is and is not.
- Develop news director and reporter training on what AMBER is.
- Encourage state coordinator to make station calls on National Missing Children's Day and to meet with station managers and others for one-on-one training.
- Train and prepare TV engineers using standardized flipchart and procedures as part of best practice.
- Have an AMBER kit in master control rooms and a clear binder on the wall that lists specifics of the AMBER Alert program. The kit should include resource information, criteria, manual, and other helpful material; stays in the station for all to use.

Testing

- Use bilingual tests.
- Train communications personnel and test monthly.
- Test on National Missing Children's Day.
- Test through tabletop exercises: full-fledged, realistic exercise; procedure for testing response and after-action process.

- Test on “ad hoc” basis.

Non/Near AMBER Alerts

For requests that do not meet the criteria:

- Offer local law enforcement assistance in burst faxing the information to the various media outlets.
- Set up complete fax list for missing child alert as an alternative to AMBER Alert for “near” AMBER cases to reduce inappropriate AMBER activations.

For reporting and reviewing:

- Include near AMBERS and denials in reporting and review committees.

Technology

Technology

- Create an AMBER Alert formatted screen for mobile terminals.
- Work continually to improve the system on limited budget.
- Improve radio communication among partners (fire, police, emergency response agencies, hospitals).

Transportation

- Short messages on signs.
- Integrate AMBER into the sign language.
- Use DOT technology grants to expedite messaging.
- Scale back messages displayed after a designated timeframe.
- Take police and other team members to see what’s involved in activating DOT signs.

Phone banks

- Have persons on staff 24/7 365 days a year or redundant backup systems.
- Have state police man the phone with an established 1-800 line and bring in agents to handle the phones.
- Staff the communication center with someone from each community participating in the plan
- Answer the 800 number with an auto-attendant (e.g., for information on AMBER Alert, press 1; for instructions on leaving a tip, press 2).
- Set up a roll-over line staffed by 3 different persons 24/7.

EAS

- Provide EAS encoder to highway patrol 24/7 to give them direct access to the primary one station.
- Include patrol in testing system twice a year.

Administrative and Legal Issues

Paperwork

- Simplify! Use one form to activate State and all partners.

Legal and legislative

- Set up review committee through legislation so it can make changes.
- Create statutory immunity for broadcasters.
- Consider becoming a nonprofit 501(C)3 to be able to accept donations, raise money, allow write offs.

Attachment A
List of Participants

Attachment B
Conference Agenda

**BRINGING OUR MISSING CHILDREN HOME:
SECOND NATIONAL AMBER ALERT CONFERENCE
September 8–10, 2004
Columbus, Ohio**

Wednesday, September 8, 2004

7:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.

Registration and Continental Breakfast

Room: Regency South Foyer

8:30 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.

Welcome and Introductions

Room: Regency Ballroom

Welcome

Cheri Nolan, Deputy Assistant Attorney General,
Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice

Keynote Address

Deborah J. Daniels, Assistant Attorney General,
Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice

Opening Remarks

The Honorable Jim Petro, Attorney General of Ohio

Logistics and Announcements

Ron Laney, Associate Administrator, Child Protection Division,
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention,
U.S. Department of Justice

9:30 a.m. – 9:45 a.m.

Break

9:45 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

**What Works, Part 1:
Media/Broadcast Industry**

Room: Regency Ballroom

Hugh Munn, Faculty, University of South Carolina,
College of Mass Communications and Information Studies
Roy Clem, Director of Membership, Alabama Broadcasters Association

Mr. Munn and Mr. Clem will discuss the role of the media and broadcast industry as partners in the AMBER Alert program. They will discuss issues related to AMBER Alert messages, the dissemination of information, and the function of public information officers.

10:30 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.

Break

Wednesday, September 8, 2004 (continued)

10:45 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Remarks and Presentation

The Honorable Bob Taft, Governor of Ohio

11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

What Works, Part 2:

Law Enforcement

Room: Regency Ballroom

*Robert Hoever, Retired, New Jersey State Police,
Former AMBER Alert Coordinator*

Mr. Hoever will examine current law enforcement practices in AMBER Alert programs across the country as well as changes that have taken place since the first national conference.

12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Luncheon

Why We Are Here: A Personal Perspective

Room: Delaware

*Maggie Maloy
Linda Maloy*

Maggie Maloy, now in her 20's, was abducted, raped, and shot multiple times after leaving her track team during practice in Galion (Crawford County), Ohio. Her abductor was caught and is serving time in prison. Maggie has made a remarkable recovery—since her ordeal, she has graduated from college and has received various awards for overcoming the obstacles life has placed in her path. Maggie's mother, Linda Maloy, is a registered nurse who became Crawford County's first victim advocate. Maggie and Linda's message is of hope and encouragement.

1:00 p.m. – 1:15 p.m.

Return to Designated Meeting Area

1:15 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

What Works, Part 3:

Department of Transportation

Room: Regency Ballroom

*Bob Rupert, Technical Programs Coordinator,
Operations Office of Transportation Management,
U.S. Federal Highway Administration*

Mr. Rupert will discuss the Department of Transportation's role in AMBER Alert programs, including effective transportation practices and AMBER program funding opportunities.

Wednesday, September 8, 2004 (continued)

2:00 p.m. – 2:15 p.m.

Break

2:15 p.m. – 2:45 p.m.

What Works, Part 4:

AMBER Alert Success Stories and Recoveries

Room: Regency Ballroom

Wayne Sheppard, Corporal, Pennsylvania State Police

Mr. Sheppard will discuss some recent AMBER Alerts, with emphasis on what elements lead to a successful recovery.

**Identifying Issues and Problems:
Breakout Sessions by Discipline**

2:45 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Instructions for Breakout Sessions

Room: Regency Ballroom

Bill Kearney, Owner and Chief Creative Officer, WBKEARNEY & Associates

3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Breakout Sessions by Discipline

Facilitators: Dan Armagh, Peter Bellmio, Fran Blair, Tim Crowe, Ray Cruz, Nicole Hayes, Cal Henderson, Bob Hoever, Gary Higgins, Bill Kearney, Phil Keith, Bob Kriesa, Hugh Munn, Gary O'Connor, Gus Paidousis, Terri Peaks, Jenny Radar, Mark Simpson, Donna Uzzell

Participants will be divided into breakout groups by discipline to discuss their particular needs and problems. Facilitators will capture the information on flipcharts, which will be summarized and used in followup breakout sessions on day 2. AMBER Alert Program Profiles will be distributed to coordinators to either complete or verify information previously collected. All profiles will be collected during the breakout session on day 2.

5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

Reception

Room: Delaware A, B, C

Thursday, September 9, 2004

7:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.

Continental Breakfast

Room: Regency South Foyer

8:30 a.m. – 8:45 a.m.

**Review of Previous Day and
Housekeeping Issues**

Room: Regency Ballroom

Ron Laney, Associate Administrator, Child Protection Division,
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention,
U.S. Department of Justice

8:45 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.

AMBER Alert Program Profile Update

Room: Regency Ballroom

Phil Keith, Retired Chief, Knoxville Police Department

Chief Keith will examine the AMBER Alert program data that have been collected thus far, based on the AMBER Alert Program Profiles that were submitted prior to the Dallas conference last year. AMBER coordinators who submitted the form last year will be asked to check their information. Coordinators who have not yet filled out the form will be asked to turn in their completed profiles during the afternoon breakout session.

9:30 a.m. – 9:45 a.m.

Break

9:45 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.

**What Works, Part 5:
Legal Issues for Information Sharing and
Team Work**

Room: Regency Ballroom

Dr. Bernie James, Professor, Pepperdine University

Dr. James will discuss ways for improving information sharing and collaboration among AMBER Alert partners. Legal issues and best practice options will be explored in terms of working with partner agencies in case reconciliation and case review processes. Time for questions and answers will be allowed.

10:45 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Break

Thursday, September 9, 2004 (continued)

11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

**What Works, Part 6:
Secondary Distribution of AMBER Alerts:
NCMEC Memorandum of Understanding**

Room: Regency Ballroom

Nancy Hammer, General Counsel and Director of the International Division, NCMEC

Ray Cruz, Law Enforcement Liaison, NCMEC

John Rabun, Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, NCMEC

The speakers will address the content and purpose of the recently developed AMBER Alert Secondary Distribution MOU and explain how it will help to ensure responsible broadcasting of AMBER Alerts beyond EAS. The role of NCMEC also will be explored.

12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Luncheon

Room: Delaware

The Honorable Gregory G. Lockhart, U.S. Attorney, Southern District of Ohio

1:00 p.m. – 1:15 p.m.

Return to Designated Meeting Area

1:15 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

**What Works, Part 7:
Tried, True, and New Remedies for
Recovering Parentally Abducted Children**

Room: Regency Ballroom

Patricia M. Hoff, Esquire

What legal remedies can be applied to parental abduction cases? Ms. Hoff will discuss the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act (UCCJEA), a uniform State law designed to deter interstate parental kidnapping and promote uniform jurisdiction and enforcement provisions in interstate child custody and visitation cases.

2:00 p.m. – 2:15 p.m.

Break

Thursday, September 9, 2004 (continued)

2:15 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

**What Works, Part 8:
Child Recovery Plans**

Room: Regency Ballroom
Gary O'Connor, Consultant

What does an effective child recovery plan look like? And what is the relationship of the child recovery plan to the AMBER Alert program? Mr. O'Connor will explore these and related issues.

3:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.

Break

3:15 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

**Identifying What Works:
Regional Breakout Sessions**

Facilitators: Dan Armagh, Peter Bellmio, Fran Blair, Tim Crowe, Ray Cruz, Nicole Hayes, Cal Henderson, Bob Hoever, Gary Higgins, Bill Kearney, Phil Keith, Bob Kriesa, Hugh Munn, Gary O'Connor, Gus Paidousis, Terri Peaks, Jenny Radar, Mark Simpson, Donna Uzzell

AMBER Alert teams will be divided into regional groups to discuss “what works” in their AMBER Alert programs. Discussion points identified during day 1’s breakout session will help to guide the groups. Material collected here will be published in future OJJDP “What Works” guides. Completed AMBER Alert Program Profiles will be collected by the facilitators.

Friday, September 10, 2004

7:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.

Continental Breakfast

Room: Regency South Foyer

8:30 a.m. – 8:45 a.m.

Review of Previous Day and Housekeeping Issues

Room: Regency Ballroom

Ron Laney, Associate Administrator, Child Protection Division, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice

8:45 a.m. – 9:15 a.m.

Team Breakout Session Summary

Room: Regency Ballroom

Bill Kearney, Owner and Chief Creative Officer, WBKEARNEY & Associates

9:15 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.

Break

9:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

What Works, Part 9: NCIC Issues

Room: Regency Ballroom

Peter Bellmio, Consultant

Mr. Bellmio will discuss the NCIC program. Ways to enhance entry of information into NCIC and related issues will be explored.

10:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

What Works, Part 10: AMBER Alert Followup and Evaluation

Room: Regency Ballroom

Timothy Crowe, Consultant

Mr. Crowe will discuss the importance of program monitoring and evaluation, and will discuss plans for program evaluation and followup.

10:30 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.

Break

Friday, September 10, 2004 (continued)

10:45 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.

**What Works, Part 11:
Developing Standards and Providing Support
to Communities**

Room: Regency Ballroom

Ron Laney, Associate Administrator, Child Protection Division,
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention,
U.S. Department of Justice

What activities are currently underway to support AMBER Alert programs? Mr. Laney will discuss ongoing training and technical assistance efforts, standards to be used to identify exemplary programs, development of Best Practice guides, the Office of Justice Program's Web site, and AMBER in 2005.

11:15 a.m. – 11:40 a.m.

Words From the Heart: A Parent's Perspective

Room: Regency Ballroom

Colleen Nick, Victim Advocate

Ms. Colleen Nick is a spokesperson and champion for missing children and their families. Her daughter, Morgan, was abducted from a little league ball game on June 9, 1995, at 10:45 p.m. in Alma, Arkansas. She was last seen standing near her mother's car where she had stopped to empty sand from her shoes. Ms. Nick is an inspiration for families struggling to find their missing child. Her message is to never give up hope.

11:40 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Closing and Thank You

Room: Regency Ballroom

Deborah J. Daniels

08/31/04