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Progress Report on the National AMBER Alert Strategy

This is the third progress report since the October 2002, first-ever White House Conference on Missing, Exploited, and Runaway Children, when President Bush directed the Attorney General to designate a Justice Department officer to lead the effort in expanding the AMBER Alert system nationwide. Deborah J. Daniels, Assistant Attorney General for Office of Justice Programs, was appointed by Attorney General John Ashcroft to serve as the first National AMBER Alert Coordinator. With the assistance of a coordinating group composed of victims, law enforcement, broadcasters, and officials from the Departments of Justice and Transportation, Deborah Daniels has steered the national strategy in a direction designed to reach the goal of creating a seamless network for AMBER Alerts.

The substantial increase in the number of recovered children since the strategy has been in place during the past year is evidence that the national coordination is working well. Over 150 children have been recovered since AMBER Alert began in 1996. *To date, the successful recoveries of 121 children, or four-fifths of the total number of all successful recoveries, have occurred since October of 2002, when the AMBER program became a coordinated national effort.* This significant progress is attributable to better coordination and training at every level, increased public awareness, technological advances, and cooperation among law enforcement, transportation officials, and broadcasters. The collaboration of communities, states and territories, coming together to create and improve their AMBER plans, has also made a remarkable difference in the number of abducted children recovered. At the end of 2001, there were only four statewide plans, and now 49 states have statewide plans in place.

PROGRESS REPORT to date: Together with our partners in communities throughout the country, we have accomplished a great deal.

- **Assess current AMBER activity**
 - ▶ Determined status of local, statewide, and regional AMBER plans to identify national trends, characteristics, and current procedures.
 - ▶ Evaluated available technology and developed AMBER Alert draft technology standards to promote cooperation between state communications systems.
 - ▶ Held the first-ever AMBER Alert Technology Conference in December 2003 which provided 65 AMBER coordinators access to new technology to enhance AMBER communications. A conference report is posted on the Department of Justice AMBER Alert web site: amberalert.gov
 - ▶ Developed an implementation plan to monitor, report, and track national AMBER Alert progress and changes.

- **Create a coordinated AMBER network**
 - ▶ Provided training and guidance on plan development and enhancement for law enforcement, broadcasters, and transportation representatives through regional summits and missing children training courses.
 - ▶ Established federal, state, and local partnerships and promoted agreements among states and communities to develop a seamless communication network.
 - ▶ Partnered with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children to convene the first Southeast Conference on Missing and Exploited Children, held in June 2004 (AMBER Alert component included in the training).
 - ▶ Provided **criteria guidance** on issuance of AMBER Alerts, available on the AMBER Alert web site: amberalert.gov
 - ▶ Created a mechanism for secondary distribution of AMBER Alerts through agreements between the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and nationally known communication companies.
 - ▶ Established operational AMBER Alert statewide plans in 49 states.
 - ▶ Worked with the FBI in developing proper usage of the existing Child Abduction flag and the creation of a new AMBER Alert flag within the National Crime Information Center.

- **Communicate “lessons learned”**
 - ▶ Held the first-ever National Training Conference on AMBER Alert in August 2003, which brought together teams from every state to receive training, AMBER plan development, and share best practices.
 - ▶ Presented the national strategy at over 37 conferences held by broadcasters, law enforcement, and juvenile justice organizations.
 - ▶ Held a meeting in February 2004 with national and state broadcasters and media representatives, obtaining input into a process for expanding and enhancing the AMBER Alert system from a broadcaster/media perspective.
 - ▶ Raised public awareness through the creation of a national AMBER Alert web site and made it more accessible by assigning a new URL: amberalert.gov
 - ▶ Made media appearances; created training videos; and produced and distributed an AMBER Alert strategy brochure.
 - ▶ Expanded the AMBER Alert web site to include a “Toolkit” of resource material for use in commemorating National Missing Children’s Day.
 - ▶ Worked with *America’s Most Wanted* on finalizing public service announcements on missing and abducted children for wide distribution in television, radio, print, and Internet media.
 - ▶ Integrated AMBER Alert information into existing training programs and publications.
 - ▶ Made available on the AMBER Alert web site a Department of Transportation “best practices” report on Dynamic Message Signs.
 - ▶ Convened the second National Training Conference on AMBER Alert in September 2004, to share best practices and receive strategy input from every state, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

PLANS FOR THE REMAINDER OF 2004

- Develop next steps based on input from the September 2004 training conference.
- Increase the number of regional summits and localized training specific to the needs of a community.
- Help to improve communications among plan coordinators through creative use of the Internet, and develop a newsletter to include information about technologies and success stories.
- Finalize guides on AMBER Alert practices and procedures designed for a variety of audiences.
- Develop a report to the White House and the Congress on the implementation of the AMBER Alert legislation, the activities of the National Coordinator, and the effectiveness and status of the AMBER plans of each state.
- Create an AMBER Alert Fact Sheet brochure for use at public events.
- Train law enforcement officers on the proper usage of the Child Abduction and AMBER Alert flags in entering information into the National Crime Information Center and develop an instructional fact sheet and card as reference resources for officers.

| AMBER Alert Progress 1999 to date | | |
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| Year | Number of Recovered Children | Number of Statewide AMBER Plans Implemented |
| 1999 | 8 | 1 |
| 2000 | 8 | 1 |
| 2001 | 2 | 2 |
| 2002 | 26 | 28 |
| 2003 | 72 | 14 |
| 2004 (to date) | 38 | 2 |
| Total | 155 | 49 |

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