

# *Washington Statewide* **AMBER Alert Plan**



America's  
Missing  
Broadcast  
Emergency  
Response

*The Washington Statewide AMBER Alert Plan is named for 9-year-old Amber Hagerman of Arlington, Texas. In 1996, she was abducted while riding her bicycle and brutally murdered.*

*This Plan organizes a rapid response by law enforcement, broadcasters, and the public to recover an abducted child and apprehend the suspect.*

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### 1. Introduction

**AMBER Alert** in Washington is a program of voluntary cooperation among broadcasters; cable systems; social media pages and sites; local, state, and tribal law enforcement agencies; state agencies; and other participants to enhance the public's ability to assist in recovering abducted children. AMBER Alert notification is supported by notification of the public and media through email subscriptions and activation of the Emergency Alert System (EAS). The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has authorized activation of the EAS for AMBER Alerts using the "child abduction emergency (CAE)" code.

### 2. Scope and Authority of Statewide AMBER Alert Plan

The Washington Statewide AMBER Alert Plan is authorized by RCW 13.60.010. The Washington Statewide AMBER Alert Plan solely governs and authorizes the use of EAS and other methods available for public notification for AMBER Alerts throughout Washington State.

### 3. AMBER Alert Activation Approval and Scope

All AMBER Alert activations of the EAS will be statewide in scope.

When a law enforcement agency has determined that an incident may qualify for the activation of an AMBER Alert, the agency will notify the Washington State Patrol Communications Centers (WSPCC). Alert approval will be coordinated between the investigating agency and the WSP AMBER Alert Coordinator whose contact information is maintained by the WSPCC. If the WSP AMBER Alert Coordinator is not able to be reached for collaboration, the approval for the AMBER Alert will rest solely with the primary law enforcement agency.

### 4. Training

All law enforcement agencies (to include any supporting Public Safety Answering Points, or PSAPs) should complete initial training and/or refresher training on AMBER Alert criteria and how to request an activation.

### 5. Operation

Following authorized approval of AMBER Alert activation:

- The Washington State Emergency Management Division (EMD) will activate the EAS for an AMBER Alert and is the only agency authorized to do so. EMD shall also send an AMBER Alert ACCESS (A Central Computerized Enforcement Service System) administrative text message.
- The WSP Communications Center for the requesting agency OR the Washington State AMBER Alert Coordinator will make the entry, updates and cancellations via alerting software.
- The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) call center will receive the AMBER Alert via email. NCMEC, in conjunction with the Federal Emergency

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Management Agency (FEMA), will activate the Wireless Emergency Alert/Commercial Mobile Alerting System (WEA/CMAS) between the hours of 7 a.m. and 10 p.m., but ONLY if there is license plate information available to identify a possible suspect vehicle.

- Information will also be posted on the State Patrol Twitter and Facebook pages to assist in dissemination.

The investigating law enforcement agency will identify a point of contact for media and other law enforcement agencies at the time of activation. The Washington State Patrol Government and Media Relations office can be contacted for assistance with the media.

When an incident does not qualify under the criteria for an AMBER Alert, the law enforcement agency may follow the *Endangered Missing Person Advisory (EMPA) Plan*.

The Washington State AMBER Alert Coordinator is the single point of contact for a local law enforcement agency to request an activation of an AMBER Alert in another state. The state receiving the request will evaluate the AMBER Alert criteria and make its own decision whether or not to approve activation of the alert in their state.

The Washington State AMBER Alert Coordinator is the single point of contact for requests for activation of an AMBER Alert from another state. All requests for activation of an AMBER Alert in Washington from an out-of-state law enforcement agency must be submitted to the State Coordinator for evaluation of compliance with the AMBER Alert criteria set forth in this Plan.

## 6. Governance of the Statewide AMBER Alert Plan

Local, state, and tribal law enforcement agencies, broadcasters, emergency management officials, and the Department of Transportation combine their efforts through the following Statewide AMBER Alert governance model to recover abducted children:

- **State AMBER Alert Manager**

The WSP is the lead agency for the Washington Statewide AMBER Alert Plan. The Chief of the WSP is the State AMBER Alert Manager and has final decision-making authority over all aspects of the Statewide AMBER Alert Plan.

While the Chief of the WSP is ultimately accountable for program success, this responsibility is shared with other entities that form the AMBER Alert Advisory Committee.

- **State AMBER Alert Coordinator**

The AMBER Alert Coordinator is responsible for managing the operations of and procedures for the AMBER Alert notification processes any recommended changes or improvements to the notification methods and process will be made through the AMBER Alert Advisory Committee to the AMBER Alert Manager for approval.

The AMBER Alert Coordinator is also the single point of contact for Washington State with the Department of Justice and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in regard to AMBER Alerts.

- **AMBER Alert Advisory Committee**

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The AMBER Alert Advisory Committee is hereby created as a part of the Statewide AMBER Alert Plan. The Committee provides administrative oversight to develop, implement, review, and recommend revisions to all aspects of the Washington Statewide AMBER Alert Plan. Such recommendations are made to the State AMBER Alert Manager.

The AMBER Alert Advisory Committee shall be chaired by a serving committee member. The AMBER Alert Advisory Committee charter, which shall be approved by the State AMBER Alert Manager, further defines its purpose, authority, and decision-making process. The Committee shall have the same responsibilities with respect to the *Endangered Missing Person Advisory (EMPA) Plan*.

The membership of the Committee shall include representatives from local, state, and tribal law enforcement, broadcasters, a crime victim advocate, the Department of Transportation, the Washington State Emergency Management Division, and such other participants as the Committee, with the approval of the State AMBER Alert Coordinator, from time to time, shall deem necessary.

At the completion of an active AMBER Alert, the local law enforcement agency shall submit a narrative summary of the incident and the alert's role in the recovery to the AMBER Alert Coordinator. This will assist with best practices and required reporting to the Department of Justice completed by the AMBER Alert Coordinator after AMBER Alert activation.

A local law enforcement agency that has initiated an AMBER Alert should conduct a local review of the AMBER Alert with all AMBER Alert stakeholders.

- **State Emergency Communications Committee**

The State Emergency Communications Committee (SECC) has been delegated authority by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to create the State Emergency Alert System (EAS) Plan and manage EAS operations in Washington. Broadcasters must comply with the SECC's State EAS Plan to be in compliance with FCC regulations.

## 7. AMBER Alert Criteria

All elements 1 through 4 should be satisfied, after considering all the facts and circumstances of the incident, for the incident to qualify as an AMBER Alert.

1. The child is under eighteen (18) years of age, is known to be abducted, and is not a runaway or throw away from home.
2. The abducted child is believed to be in danger of imminent death or serious bodily injury.
3. There must be enough descriptive information available to believe that an AMBER Alert activation will assist in the recovery of the child. (Must include as much of the following information as possible.)
  - Where the abduction took place;
  - A specific physical description of the child [can include clothing worn when last seen; height; weight; age; hair and eye color; hair length; any additional distinguishing physical characteristics];

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- A physical description of the abductor [can include approximate height; weight; hair color/length; eye/skin color; clothing; any distinguishing physical characteristics];
  - Place last seen;
  - Description of the vehicle [color, make, model, license number, approximate year (older, newer)].
4. The incident must be reported to and investigated by a law enforcement agency and the child, suspect and vehicle information entered into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) if there is sufficient information available

### 8. Broadcaster Follow-Up Announcement Schedule

Following the broadcast of the AMBER Alert EAS message through the state relay network and/or other means, the message will be forwarded through broadcast media outlets.

Broadcasters will receive the latest detailed AMBER Alert information and photos via email or fax subscription. New information will be sent as available to broadcasters, law enforcement, the public, and many partners who forward AMBER Alerts to a wide collection of audiences.

### 9. Department of Transportation Follow-Up Announcement Schedule

Regional Traffic Management Centers (TMCs) will only respond to a request to activate an AMBER Alert through notification from the WSP, email or fax subscription or upon notification from another Regional TMC that has received notification from the WSP. Once the *initiating* local area WSP District Communications Center has notified the Regional TMC, that TMC is considered the “Initiating TMC.”

The Initiating TMC is responsible for ensuring ALL other Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) Regional TMCs have received the AMBER Alert information. Each Regional TMC must be prepared to activate an AMBER Alert upon notification by another TMC, and *without* prior approval of its associated local area WSP District Communications Center.

- There is nothing in the WSDOT AMBER Alert Standard Operating Procedures that suggests a requirement to pre-empt motorist safety messages in order to display an AMBER Alert message.
- It may also be necessary to turn off an AMBER Alert “Variable Message Sign” (VMS) message to display traffic advisory type messages, where motorist safety is concerned, or to shut down an AMBER Alert message on a particular VMS if the display itself creates a traffic hazard.
- Where there is only partial vehicle information available wording on VMS signs and text of “Highway Advisory Radio” (HAR) messages will be a joint decision between the TMC supervisor and the WSP lieutenant or above, in accordance with approved WSDOT AMBER Alert Standard Operating Procedures. WSDOT will not convey AMBER Alert messages when there is no vehicle information available.

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- The length of time alert information will remain on a VMS will be after discussion between the TMC Supervisor and a WSP lieutenant or above.
- Cancellation of AMBER Alert messaging by the Regional TMCs will be directed by the Initiating TMC after WSP verification, or by the email or fax messaging modes or other means.
- **Note:** Unless the child has been recovered, cancellation of the AMBER Alert messages on WSDOT HARs and VMSs does not necessarily imply the AMBER Alert is finished; it simply indicates that WSDOT active participation using Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) devices has concluded.

### 10. Wireless Emergency Alerts/Commercial Mobile Alerting System (WEA/CMAS)

- NCMEC, in conjunction with FEMA, will activate the WEA/CMAS system for AMBER Alert activations that occur between the hours of 7 a.m. and 10 p.m. These alerts are only issued when there is a license plate number available and brief vehicle description.
- WEA/CMAS messages are issued for initial activation and any updates of vehicle information to the alert. There is no cancellation message.
- As with EAS activations, WEA/CMAS activations will be statewide in scope.
- The NCMEC call center or the State AMBER Alert Coordinator can be contacted for questions about activations of WEA/CMAS.

