
National Conference on AMBER Alert Conference Proceedings Report

Background and Overview

At the White House Conference on Missing, Exploited, and Runaway Children on October 2, 2002, President Bush directed the Attorney General to designate a Justice Department officer to serve as AMBER Alert Coordinator to help expand the AMBER Alert system nationwide. The Attorney General named Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Justice Programs, Deborah J. Daniels, as the National AMBER Alert Coordinator and in doing so, gave her the responsibility for helping to encourage the creation and coordination of local, state, and regional efforts to establish AMBER Alert plans and for enhancing AMBER Alert plans across the country. In this capacity, she serves as a nationwide point of contact and works with states and localities to increase the number of AMBER Alert plans and ensure that the plans work together as a seamless network.

In the 10 months since Ms. Daniels was named as the National AMBER Alert Coordinator, several major initiatives have been taken to gain input and insight from the field on ways to effectively and appropriately enhance and expand the use of the AMBER Alert system throughout the United States.

- A National Advisory Group was established to oversee the overall national AMBER Alert initiative and to make recommendations on the AMBER Alert criteria, examine new technologies, identify best practices, and address problems and concerns. The Advisory Group was instrumental in the design and development of the National Conference on AMBER Alert, the development of a national AMBER Alert strategy, and the formulation of recommendations for ongoing assistance and support to AMBER Alert programs nationwide.
- A working group was convened on December 9, 2002, to obtain input and assistance from experts from law enforcement, media, public agencies, and private organizations to strengthen and improve the use of the AMBER Alert plan as a tool to help recover missing or abducted children.
- A training committee was established to design a comprehensive program of training and technical assistance to support local, state, and regional AMBER Alert plan efforts.
- A National Conference on AMBER Alert was held in Dallas, Texas, on August 3–5, 2003, to encourage greater communication and collaboration in order to improve AMBER Alert programs and processes, raise understanding and awareness about issues relating to missing children, and provide an opportunity for jurisdictions to work together to develop a seamless AMBER Alert network.

Conference Goals

The goals of the conference were:

- To increase awareness about missing children and victimology issues.
- To promote greater collaboration between local, state, and regional AMBER Alert programs through the development of Memorandums of Understanding.
- To develop a self-assessment process to determine readiness and examine programmatic strengths and weaknesses.
- To create protocols regarding the issuance of an AMBER Alert on a local, state, and regional level.
- To provide information and input to be used in the development of ongoing training and technical assistance activities for local, state, and regional AMBER Alert teams.
- To provide recommendations on “best practices” by discipline to be used to improve and enhance AMBER Alert plans.
- To develop recommendations for effective strategies and protocols to be used to enhance AMBER Alert plans, including a child recovery strategy.
- To identify and document current practices and strategies for improving individual AMBER plans.
- To use the results and outcomes of the conference to provide guidance in developing “best practice” protocols for issuing an AMBER Alert.

Conference Design

This 3-day conference was designed for AMBER Alert plan “teams” from each region, state, territory, and locality and the District of Columbia. Each team was led by the AMBER plan coordinator and also included the president or designee from the state broadcast association, a local law enforcement representative responsible for implementing the AMBER Alert plan in his or her jurisdiction, and a highway safety coordinator or other state Department of Transportation (DOT) representative who works with the AMBER Alert program in each state. A total of 287 AMBER Alert representatives attended this conference. A participant list is included in Attachment A.

The conference included both lecture and working group sessions. The lecture portion of the agenda was aimed at increasing awareness and understanding about the nature of missing children cases and individuals who abduct children, promoting greater awareness about the AMBER Alert system and how it operates, and providing a framework for establishing a broader

child recovery plan that includes the AMBER Alert system as a tool in the overall plan. The purpose of the working group portion of the conference was to allow each discipline (media/broadcasters, law enforcement, and transportation) to identify problems, issues, and best practices and then to allow these issues and best practices to be applied at the local, state, and regional levels through facilitated regional breakout sessions.

Several additional activities were undertaken as part of the conference planning activities to increase awareness and understanding about the AMBER Alert system and its current practice. A review of existing state legislation was conducted and a matrix of results was prepared (this matrix is contained in a special CD-ROM titled *AMBER Alert Resources*, which was developed specifically for the conference). To identify national trends and characteristics of AMBER Alert plans, a review of 92 plans was conducted. A review of current procedures also was undertaken to identify current practices and procedures. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children began to capture information on all “Child Abduction Flag” cases to determine whether an AMBER Alert was issued by the local/state police. Finally, the Department of Justice’s Office of Justice Programs developed AMBER Alert draft XML standards to promote interoperability of state communications systems and establish a protocol and standard for AMBER Alert programs.

Conference Report

Part 1 of this report contains a summary of the findings and recommendations generated during the breakout session titled *Determining Best Practices for Issuing an AMBER Alert for Media/Broadcasters, Law Enforcement, and Transportation*, as well as a brief summary of the results of the conference evaluation. Part 2 contains copies of the work sheets generated in each of the working group sessions. The results of the second breakout session, titled *Collaboration and Coordination—A Key to the Success of the AMBER Alert*, are not included in this report. This breakout session was designed to give local, state, and regional AMBER Alert programs the opportunity to work independently and collaboratively to identify action steps to enhance the AMBER Alert network at the local, state, and regional levels. These action plans will be used to provide followup training and technical assistance to communities.

Next Steps

The first National Conference is one of several strategies designed to improve and expand the AMBER Alert network nationwide. Other strategies include:

- Developing a comprehensive program of technical assistance and training to support local action for improving the AMBER Alert system. This training and technical assistance program will be based on the results of the conference and will be designed with assistance from the National Advisory Group and Training Committee referenced earlier in this report.
- Conducting a technology conference on December 3–4, 2003 in Memphis, Tennessee, to provide a forum in which AMBER Alert coordinators can learn about the different technology options that are available to support their programs.

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- Disseminating the conference results to all participants to insure that all knowledge is reported and shared.
 - Completing followup evaluations to assess the impact of this conference and the changes that have been brought about as a result of our ongoing support, communication, and collaboration.
 - Encouraging and promoting regular communication among and between jurisdictions to improve understanding about “effective or best” practices and to enable jurisdictions to learn from each other.

Part 1—Findings and Recommendations, Evaluation and Conclusions

Findings and Recommendations

Organizing Stakeholders

One factor that contributes to the success of the AMBER Alert program is having the right stakeholders at the table to develop, organize, and manage the program. This includes having representatives from appropriate agencies, as well as having a manageable number of stakeholders for planning, developing, and managing the plan. Several other stakeholder issues can also adversely impact the AMBER Alert program, including the lack of leadership (or a single point of contact), the absence of a formal structure, misunderstandings about stakeholder roles and responsibilities, the absence of a formal agenda and goals, and the lack of communication, coordination, and collaboration among state and regional plans. Turf issues, politics, stakeholder competition, and territorial issues can hinder stakeholder actions and prevent stakeholders from moving forward with the development and implementation of a formal AMBER Alert system.

Recommendations

- 1. At a minimum, stakeholders from representative groups, including law enforcement, media/broadcast, transportation, and emergency management systems (EMS), should become partners in the development, planning, and management of the AMBER Alert plan at the local, state, and regional levels. As plans expand from the local to the regional level, stakeholders should be commensurate with the type of program and geographical limitations.**
- 2. Regularly scheduled stakeholder meetings should be conducted for the purpose of information sharing, ongoing communication, education, case review, monitoring, and problem solving.**
- 3. A single point of contact (gatekeeper) should be identified to facilitate meetings and promote communication. It is recommended that a law enforcement representative serve in this capacity.**
- 4. Clear policies, procedures, roles, and responsibilities for stakeholder involvement should be established.**
- 5. Existing child advocacy coalitions and/or regional and/or local AMBER partnerships should be explored as a potential stakeholder group.**

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- 6. Communities should think “outside the box” when identifying appropriate stakeholders to insure that the necessary partners are around the table. In addition to the stakeholders described above, some additional stakeholders to consider are representatives from the state lottery, cable operators, border control, trucking industry, wireless industry, international partners, etc.**
 - 7. Both primary and secondary stakeholders should be identified and utilized.**

Developing Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs)

MOUs are powerful tools for organizing, managing, and facilitating AMBER Alert communication and collaboration. However, the development and use of comprehensive MOUs can be challenging for AMBER Alert programs. The expansion and enhancement of the AMBER Alert program and network across the country can be hindered by the lack of standardization and consistency among AMBER Alert programs and MOUs, criteria variations among programs and states, disagreements about agency involvement as well as agency roles and responsibilities, and the lack of communication.

Recommendations

- 1. Establish agreements incrementally. First, develop an MOU among the primary partners—media/broadcasters, law enforcement, and transportation—and then expand the MOU to include other stakeholders and partners.**
- 2. Create a generic MOU that can serve as a guide for AMBER Alert programs at the local, state, and regional levels.**
- 3. Use the MOU to identify agency roles and responsibilities.**
- 4. Institutionalize the MOU through training and ongoing communication to insure full understanding and acceptance of the parameters of the MOU.**

Criteria for Activation

A number of concerns were raised about activating an AMBER Alert. The following factors were cited as potential impediments to the expansion and enhancement of the AMBER Alert system: differences in state criteria, language, and definitions; the inability to verify the accuracy of the information for all cases; and problems with information dissemination. The lack of training for staff responsible for activating an alert, as well as political pressures that can lead to the activation of an alert that does not meet criteria, were also raised as concerns by conference participants.

Recommendations

- 1. Open communication should be maintained among stakeholders to: a) avoid problems that relate to activating alerts that do not meet criteria, b) insure consistency and standardization, and c) develop a seamless AMBER Alert system.**
- 2. Law enforcement should be designated as the single point of contact and decisionmaker for issuing an AMBER Alert.**
- 3. Standard, clear, and consistent age criteria for issuing an AMBER Alert should be used throughout the country.**
- 4. Training should be provided to law enforcement, AMBER Alert plan oversight groups, other stakeholders, and the community to keep them informed and educated about what constitutes an AMBER Alert and about their respective roles and responsibilities when issuing an alert.**
- 5. Communities should also incorporate other options and actions that can be used when an abduction does not meet AMBER Alert criteria. These options should be part of the broader child abduction recovery plan.**

Oversight and Evaluation

Providing for oversight and evaluation was identified as another critical factor contributing to the effectiveness of the AMBER Alert program. However, determining who should be involved in this process, the lack of timely and regular followup and review, and the absence of a formal evaluation process were all cited as impediments to the program.

Recommendations

- 1. A working group comprising key stakeholders should be defined and given responsibility for ongoing, regular, structured reviews of AMBER Alerts and debriefings of involved parties. This group should include law enforcement, media/broadcasters, and transportation as equal partners. Consideration should be given as to whether this group should be authorized through administrative or legislative directive.**
- 2. Regular tests of the system and process should be undertaken as part of this oversight and evaluation to determine program strengths and weaknesses and to identify areas for improvements. Care should be taken to distinguish between regular monitoring/oversight and program evaluation.**
- 3. Responsibility for oversight and evaluation should rest with the local AMBER Alert program.**
- 4. Training should be provided to the necessary partners to insure program effectiveness.**

Quality Control Process

A number of concerns were voiced with regard to the process for insuring quality control of AMBER Alert programs. Concerns included system overuse, lack of consistency, lack of a single point of contact for activating an alert, staff turnover, lack of training (at the CEO and staff levels) and lack of testing of the plan and the technologies for proficiency. Another issue that was raised was the inability to control outside factors (e.g., the use of the color amber/orange for Homeland Security threat advisories and the confusion that this has caused during several AMBER Alert activations).

Recommendations

- 1. Testing of the procedures and plans was identified as a central way to insure quality control and maintain program integrity. This includes stakeholder review and verification of information prior to activation of an alert. Minimum standards should be developed for this purpose. Plans should be reviewed every 12–18 months.**
- 2. Thorough and high-quality documentation (information and pictures), communication, and the use of standardized forms to insure accuracy of information also should be used to contribute to positive program performance.**
- 3. Education and training for law enforcement, broadcasters, and the public should be used to preserve the integrity of the program (at both the CEO and staff levels).**

Alert Activation Protocol

Once an abduction meets the criteria of an AMBER Alert, the ability of a community to activate the alert is based on several factors. These factors include the ability to verify information, the accessibility of the system(s) to send out an alert, and the ability to insure that all pertinent information is relayed in a timely manner. Unfortunately, several impediments were cited that can impact the ability of a community, state, or region to activate an alert. These impediments include the lack of written procedures to guide the process, the absence of national standards, political or professional pressures that sometimes dictate an agency's response, emergency alert system (EAS) equipment failures and inability to man the EAS on a full-time basis, timing constraints, and the inability in some instances to verify information. The lack of a central point of contact, as well as the lack of sufficient training, were also viewed as impediments to a smooth activation process.

Recommendations

- 1. A single authorizing agency/decisionmaker who uses standard, minimum criteria and standards is necessary for maintaining program integrity and control. This protocol is essential at the local, state, and regional program levels. Coordination of all levels of programs should be specifically addressed in MOUs.**
- 2. Backup systems and protocols, including minimum standards, need to be established to insure that alerts can be activated around the clock.**
- 3. Written protocols, procedures, and guidelines need to be established to guide activation procedures within states and regions. These protocols should be communicated to all necessary stakeholders and should be incorporated into state EAS protocols. Training should be provided for all procedures and protocols to insure compliance.**
- 4. Forms and checklists should be developed and used to guide the activation process to insure that activations meet the criteria and that the integrity of the program is secured.**
- 5. Various systems should be explored as potential vehicles for disseminating alert information. Cross-checks of all systems should be undertaken regularly to insure their interoperability.**
- 6. Protocols for activations AND "deactivations" should be developed, reviewed, and tested.**

Technologies To Support Activations

The AMBER Alert system relies heavily on the ability to activate an alert on an around-the-clock basis with coverage that is comprehensive and reliable. Several factors were identified that can be detrimental to the ability of a locality, state, or region to send out the alert to the necessary recipients. These include EAS equipment failures, DOT restrictions on signs, system incompatibilities, unattended primary stations, breakdown of relay networks, and old and/or complicated equipment. Other issues include the fraudulent use of the name AMBER Alert, the influx of private vendors who are flooding the system, and the lack of adequate information about new technologies that can provide additional support for activations.

Recommendations

- 1. States, regions, and local coordinators should be innovative in their approach to sending out alerts and should consider additional mechanisms such as state lottery, trucking industry, Internet, satellite, highway fuel stops, listservs, 511, kiosks, rest areas, National Crime Information Center/National Law Enforcement Telecommunications System (NCIC/NLETS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and others to support their activations.**
- 2. System failures should be documented, reviewed, and repaired on an ongoing basis to insure program integrity.**
- 3. Public/private partnerships should be explored to support innovation.**

Training for Stakeholders

There is an absence of systematic training for all stakeholders. This is particularly true with law enforcement agencies. Training for CEOs and staff-level personnel on development, implementation, and ongoing maintenance and evaluation does not exist. This void creates confusion and a lack of minimum standards for AMBER Alert plans.

Furthermore, training does not currently exist to support the development or enhancement of the AMBER Alert system. This includes training for law enforcement, media, transportation, sign operators, and the public. The training that may exist is not mandatory, consistent, or readily available.

Recommendations

- 1. Standardized training should become an ongoing part of the overall AMBER Alert program. To be successful, training must be provided on an ongoing basis at all levels, be consistent, be readily available and accessible, and include various mediums in order to reach the broadest audience. This includes onsite training, videotraining, brochures, train-the-trainer programs, and documentation.**
- 2. Training programs should be developed for a wide range of audience groups, including law enforcement, dispatch operators, broadcasters, NCIC operators, and other AMBER Alert stakeholders.**
- 3. Training programs should be reviewed and evaluated to insure that learning objectives are achieving their intended purpose. Checklists should be developed and used for this purpose to insure consistency and to establish a basis for both process and impact evaluation.**

After-Action Protocols and Reporting

An important issue that is often overlooked is the post-alert followup and assessment. After-action protocols and reporting procedures are an important part of a successful AMBER Alert system because they allow a state or region to fully examine and assess its process, protocols, and procedures and make improvements on a timely and ongoing basis. Some of the factors that prevent states and regions from focusing on this component of the AMBER Alert program include not identifying who is responsible for this activity and who needs to be involved, questions about how to report/monitor activities, liability concerns, the time-sensitive nature of these actions, and other quality assurance measures.

Recommendations

- 1. A review/oversight committee should conduct followup reviews and assessments of activations and reporting. This committee should include representatives from the primary stakeholders and should provide for broadcaster immunity. If broadcaster immunity is not established by a statutory provision, an operating agreement stating such immunity should be developed and implemented.**
- 2. After-action reporting and monitoring should be done on a regular basis (at least quarterly) and should include formal reports to document findings, actions, recommendations, and enhancements.**
- 3. Minimum standards should be developed for AMBER Alert activations, which will form the basis for the after-action reporting and monitoring.**

Phone Bank Use and Staffing

Phone bank use and staffing relate specifically to the law enforcement function. Some of the concerns and problems noted in this area include the lack of standards and training, the need for increased staff and more effective/high-quality equipment, questions regarding how information is disseminated and the mechanisms through which it passes, and the need to develop a plan with respect to roles, responsibilities, and processes that will be used.

Recommendations

- 1. A series of activities should be undertaken to insure the effective operation and use of a phone bank system. This includes establishing regional phone banks, local 911 numbers, 800 toll-free numbers, phone stacking systems, and non-emergency numbers; securing relief personnel; providing standardized training; and creating a call-out plan with other agencies.**
- 2. Methods of obtaining additional resources, including resource sharing and using private vendor assistance, should be explored to support the enhancements of the phone bank system.**
- 3. Proper staffing and supervision structures need to be in place to insure effective management, operation, and monitoring of the system.**

Evaluation and Conclusions

Of the 287 conference participants, 232 (80%) completed the conference evaluation. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that the conference was extremely successful in achieving its intended goals (as listed earlier in this report) and that each of the presentations and breakout sessions provided very valuable information that will benefit individual agencies and AMBER Alert teams. On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being the highest rating), all conference ratings were 4.0 or higher.

Conference participants provided a number of suggestions on topics and issues to be addressed in future training conferences and followup technical assistance. These suggestions included:

- An indepth review and discussion of child recovery plans.
- A review of technical system integration issues and opportunities.
- An overview of best practices (what works and what does not work).
- A discussion about minimum standards and specific AMBER Alert criteria.
- Additional regional work sessions to facilitate collaboration and communication.
- Training on case investigation strategies.
- Training for all AMBER Alert disciplines (media/broadcasters, law enforcement, transportation) at all levels (CEOs through line staff).

These suggestions, as well as others raised during the conference proceedings, will be discussed in developing the overall training and technical assistance strategy that will support the continued development and enhancement of AMBER Alert programs nationwide. The conference results will form the basis for future actions and will help to focus technical assistance and training activities on the areas where assistance is most needed.

Part 2—Breakout Session Reports

Determining Best Practices for Issuing an AMBER Alert for Media/Broadcasters, Law Enforcement, and Transportation

Media/Broadcasters—Determining Best Practices

Organizing Stakeholders

Problems and Issues

- C Determining who is in charge (agency and overall)
- C Confusion about when to activate
- C Coordinating regional and state plans
- C Territory and turf issues—politics
- C Need for a single point of contact

What Works

- C EAS should be voluntary
- C Certifying stakeholders (minimum standards requirements)
- C Identifying new stakeholders (trucking industry, wireless industry, utilities, cable, nonprofit/missing children organizations, lottery, international/border control)
- C Assessing “wanna-be” stakeholders
- C Identifying primary and secondary stakeholders

Developing MOUs

Problems and Issues

- C Lack of communication
- C Difficulty keeping current players aware of MOUs as jobs change
- C Multistate agreements
- C Legislative language, legality, and liability issues
- C Differences in age limitations

What Works

- C Creating agreements between law enforcement and broadcasters
- C Allowing the broadcast association to disseminate agreement to other media outlets for comment and input
- C Partner acceptance of protocols and procedures
- C Identifying a central authority for activating alerts
- C Using standard criteria
- C Creating signed agreements for regional partners
- C Establishing a review board
- C Promoting interstate communication
- C Institutionalizing MOUs through training, central coordinating function, and geographic size impacts
- C Using language that speaks to the voluntary nature of the program, legal issues, and liability issues
- C Creating an agreement with the National Weather Service (NWS) that expands the network and serves as a backup to the EMS
- C Involving more cable networks
- C Insuring that interstate actions are handled by authorized law enforcement agencies using MOUs between jurisdictions

Criteria for Activation

Problems and Issues

- C Determining who is in charge
- C Multiple states
- C Verifying information
- C Lack of law enforcement training
- C Notification codes
- C Age issues (different ages of majority, what to do about young adults and college students)
- C Criteria consistency
- C Getting non-EAS messages to media
- C Meeting state and local requirements
- C Pressure to expand age criteria (political issues)
- C Standardized language (abduction, child, threat, information, time)
- C Issuance of “almost” AMBER versus actual AMBER (news story versus real case)
- C Media role in establishing criteria

What Works

- C Law enforcement decisionmaking
- C Standardized, clear criteria (nationwide)
- C Identifying a single authorizing agency that the broadcast industry can trust
- C Insuring that law enforcement provides all information to media (pictures, etc.)
- C Uniform age (national)
- C Using a range of actions (EAS, other)
- C Adapting to growth of AMBER as a natural process (geographical issues and impact)

Oversight and Evaluation

Problems and Issues

- C Need for a review process
- C Need for a gatekeeper
- C Lack of evaluation processes
- C Overuse of AMBER Alerts (cases that do not fit criteria)

What Works

- C Review committee (post-event and regular monitoring/review)
- C Regular system tests
- C Local quality control
- C Communication
- C Proper law enforcement training
- C Distribution to all media outlets
- C Oversight/evaluation included in state legislation
- C Authority for review committee (appointed vs. legislated)

Quality Control Process

Problems and Issues

- C Overuse of AMBER Alerts by broadcasters
- C Lack of law enforcement training
- C Need to test technology equipment
- C Need to test chain of command
- C Confusion about AMBER Alert colors (as they relate to Homeland Security)
- C Length of message

What Works

- C Well-recorded announcement
- C Broadcaster education on the use of the system and terminology on other missing children cases
- C Ongoing review process
- C Web-based training
- C Developing a template and including it in the plan
- C Establishing time limitations
- C Using “plain and simple” language
- C Broadcast of quality photos
- C Standardized forms

Alert Activation Protocols

Problems and Issues

- C Type of medium used (fax, e-mail, etc)
- C Lack of written procedures
- C Event and location codes
- C Security issues
- C Need for law enforcement to understand that there should be significant new developments to justify subsequent EAS activations
- C Lack of training
- C Timing issues
- C Turnover (state and regional)
- C State differences in criteria and activation procedures

What Works

- C Written step-by-step protocols
- C Addendum to EAS activation
- C EAS and NOAA involvement
- C Standardization of protocols
- C Training and coordination
- C Written protocols in state EAS plan
- C Cross-checks
- C Disseminating preliminary information prior to activation

Technologies To Support Activations

Problems and Issues

- C Breakdown of relay networks
- C Unattended primary stations
- C Fraudulent use of name
- C Lack of highway signs
- C Lack of alternatives
- C Determining the best method/medium (EAS may not be the best)
- C System incompatibility
- C Old and/or complicated equipment
- C Codes
- C Unreliability of EAS
- C Costs
- C Statewide law enforcement frequencies
- C Redundant paths of communication

What Works

- C Fax, e-mail, Internet, satellite, roadside, NWS, lottery, truck drivers, highway fuel stops, etc.

Training for Stakeholders

Problems and Issues

- C Cost and time
- C Lack of training (minimum standards, CEO training, staff training, certification training, etc.)

What Works

- C Internet-based training
- C Law enforcement training credits
- C Quarterly training for law enforcement
- C Annual training for broadcasters and new departments
- C Training videos
- C Clear understanding of criteria

AMBER Alert Protocols and Reporting

Problems and Issues

- C How to report additional information/
cancellation of an alert

What Works

- C Web sites
- C Review/oversight committee
- C Broadcaster immunity

Law Enforcement—Determining Best Practices

Organizing Stakeholders

Problems and Issues

- Not having all stakeholders at the table (issues relating to identification and recruitment) or having too many stakeholders
- C Not being inclusive in defining stakeholders
- C Lack of communication with interstate stakeholders
- C Competition among stakeholders (e.g., business, politics, etc.)
- C Lack of understanding about roles
- C Need to create subcommittees
- C Need to develop and prioritize an agenda
- C Need to establish team and team leadership

What Works

- C Identifying stakeholders by representative groups
- C Holding meetings between law enforcement, broadcasters, transportation, EMS
- C Identifying a coordinator
- C Identifying a “gatekeeper”
- C Establishing policies

Developing MOUs

Problems and Issues

- C Determining best practices
- C Lack of consistent minimum standards
- C Criteria differences (plan name differences)
- C Disagreement on stakeholder roles
- C Financial impact of regional/multistate activations
- C Difficulty obtaining multiple jurisdiction agreement and consensus
- C Defining participants
- C Need to develop mandates

What Works

- C Initial focus on law enforcement coordination
- C Interstate plan integrity
- C Screening of interstate requests (right to deny)
- C Creating MOUs between law enforcement, broadcasters, and transportation to standardize criteria, permit flexibility, and create a single point of contact
- C Establishing mandates
- C Using MOUs as a guide

Criteria for Activation

Problems and Issues

- C Determining best practices
- C Different age criteria
- C Different definitions (e.g., stranger/nonparental abductions)
- C Embellishing case to meet criteria
- C Lack of staff training
- C Misconceptions about denied requests
- C Activation delays
- C Differences in state and regional plans
- C State compliance with other states' activation criteria
- C Law enforcement definition of imminent danger
- C Lack of (or too much) descriptive information
- C Lack of (or too much) flexibility
- C Elapsed time

What Works

- C Specificity
- C Clear, standard, national definitions (use the statutory definition of child—a person under the age of 18)
- C Standardized training
- C Sufficient descriptive information
- C Creating a second-level plan without EAS
- C Full faith and credit
- C Designating one person/supervisor for activation
- C Developing training for law enforcement, community, and citizens on criteria and their roles

Oversight and Evaluation

Problems and Issues

- C Not defining or creating an effective oversight group with the required authority
- C Lack of timely and frequent reviews

What Works

- C Creating a working group of stakeholders
- C Developing an ongoing review process
- C Creating equal partnership between law enforcement, broadcasters, and transportation
- C Separating and structuring the oversight function from the evaluation function
- C Sharing accomplishments in order to prevent further mistakes

Quality Control Process

Problems and Issues

- C Having too many people who can activate alarms
- C Not clearly defining who is authorized to activate alarms
- C Lack of training
- C Staff turnover issues
- C Lack of information dissemination

What Works

- C Creating a screening process
- C Creating a pass code for testing
- C Having the ability to verify information (by an authorized agency)
- C Establishing a stakeholder review process
- C Insuring law enforcement followup
- C Providing information to the law enforcement community (e.g., through a newsletter)

Alert Activation Protocol

Problems and Issues

- C Intrastate and interstate differences
- C Nonqualifying activations (e.g., local law enforcement agencies activate alarms to cover themselves, activations done as a result of political pressure)
- C Alerting media when the case does not qualify
- C Lack of consistency and decision making
- C EAS concerns—lack of around-the-clock coverage, EAS equipment failure
- C Lack of ongoing training
- C Information relay
- C Understanding that AMBER is not a cure-all and does not fit all cases

What Works

- C Identifying a single authorizing agency
- C Developing certified training and testing
- C Establishing a thorough review process (including an activation checklist)
- C Developing other AMBER Alert tools (e.g., a checklist for sex offenders, reverse 911, other investigative steps following AMBER activation)
- C Creating a protocol for activation and cancellation
- C Developing a backup protocol/system
- C Verifying information
- C Using blast fax, mass dialers
- C Tracking activation denials

Technologies To Support Activations

Problems and Issues

- C Lack of cancellation procedures
- C Limited resources
- C Influx of private “for profit” vendors
- C Need for simultaneous dissemination
- C Inability to contact hard-to-reach areas
- C Technical ability to activate EAS regionally versus statewide
- C Single phone lines that dump on multiple lines
- C EAS equipment failure
- C Continued funding
- C Child abduction emergency (CAE) code versus voluntary update by broadcasting association
- C Need for technology to initiate chain reaction activation
- C DOT restrictions on signage: variable message signs (VMS)
- C Lack of information about new technologies

What Works

- C Creating methods to obtain resources
- C Using Internet-based applications
- C Creating mutual aid agreements
- C Using dedicated phone banks
- C Updating the EAS
- C Using Web- and satellite-based activations
- C Using other vehicles/technologies (e.g., NOAA, lottery, 511, reverse 911, blast-fax, posters, e-mail, etc.)
- C Testing the emergency broadcast and AMBER alerts
- C Public education
- C Use of NCIC/NLETS
- C Creating partnerships with other state and local organizations (e.g., nonprofit organizations)
- C Establishing DOT VMS minimal standards
- C Identifying/reviewing failures

Training for Stakeholders

Problems and Issues

- C Lack of consistency
- C Lack of interest
- C Voluntary vs. mandatory training
- C Need for alternatives to offsite training
- C Scheduling of training/logistics
- C Lack of information about technologies
- C Lack of training (particularly state-mandated training) and training consistency

What Works

- C Alternative training and education (video, online, brochures, train the trainer, pocket card for ticket booth operators, public service announcements)
- C “Portable” training
- C Standardized training for law enforcement recruits, dispatch, NCIC operators, and all AMBER Alert personnel
- C Continuity
- C Videotapes: law enforcement and civilians
- C Distributing information to all agencies
- C Testing plans to identify training issues

After-Action Protocol and Reporting

Problems and Issues

- C Lack of public information
- C Lack of reports and questions about who submits the report
- C Liability protection
- C Timeliness
- C Need for participation by critical members

What Works

- C Mandatory reporting to an oversight group/review committee
- C Minimum standards
- C Formal after-action reports
- C Contact agency involvement
- C Standard testing
- C Documentation and tracking of data
- C Continual systems improvement

Phone Bank Use and Staffing

Problems and Issues

- C Lack of training
- C Absence of standards
- C Lack of adequate staffing and equipment
- C Need for designated line/phone numbers
- C Determining how information is passed down at the state level
- C Establishing a call-out plan
- C Determining who prioritizes leads
- C Assurance of a high-quality phone system

What Works

- C Creating methods to obtain resources
- C Using private vendor assistance
- C Standardized training
- C Creating a lead tracking system
- C Developing regional phone banks
- C Using local 911, non-emergency numbers, 800 toll-free numbers
- C Developing a phone stacking system
- C Obtaining the necessary information
- C Separating call lines
- C Providing for relief
- C Using a standardized question form
- C Insuring proper supervision
- C Creating a call-out plan and agreement with other agencies
- C Security

Transportation— Determining Best Practices

Organizing Stakeholders

Problems and Issues

- C Resources sparsely placed
- C No routine/natural coordination
- C No formal structure
- C Lack of multistate cooperation
- C Determining responsibility
- C Getting everyone to the table

What Works

- C Using existing coalitions/partnerships
- C Involving state and local officials
- C Determining/applying operational concepts (states, media, out-of-state agencies)
- C Law enforcement leadership
- C Basing program/stakeholders on Governor's mandate
- C Creating state programs then regional program
- C Using a central location for law enforcement and transportation
- C Including transportation, law enforcement, media, and state lottery associations

Developing MOUs

Problems and Issues

- C Lack of standard MOUs
- C All players are not included in MOU
- C Border state/international (Canada and Mexico) issues
- C Uniformity

What Works

- C Standardization—using a boilerplate MOU (patterned after stakeholder MOUs)
- C Using standard operating procedures (SOPs) (interstate) and MOUs (intrastate)
- C Coordination through local incident management teams
- C Identifying a single point of contact
- C Insuring broad involvement at the onset of the program/plan

Criteria for Activation

Problems and Issues

- C Law enforcement should be responsible for contacting surrounding states
- C Determining message priority and duration
- C Public perception of message priority versus that of DOT or Federal Highway Administration

What Works

- C Deferring to local law enforcement for activation/deactivation
- C Using written plan, public education, and common sense
- C Establishing deactivation procedures
- C Maintaining continual communication with law enforcement

Oversight and Evaluation

Problems and Issues

- C Determining who participates in oversight and evaluation
- C Lack of followup or review
- C Transportation often is an afterthought

What Works

- C Conducting quarterly reviews
- C Debriefing after alert activation (attorney general/DOT/law enforcement /media/etc.)
- C Establishing verification process in SOP (minimum standards)
- C Creating a structured review process using oversight committee
- C Including necessary partners (leadership, corporate partners, statewide coordinator)
- C Insure consistency through: program name, abduction confirmation, person-to-person contact and written verification, media /DOT coordination for effective response, and regular testing

Quality Control Process

Problems and Issues

- C Alert consistency
- C Activation confirmation and accuracy of information
- C Message priority and verification
- C Assignment of responsibilities
- C Misunderstood sign abbreviations

What Works

- C Testing protocols and procedures
- C Documentation
- C Use of other media

Alert Activation Protocol

Problems and Issues

- C Verification with reporting party
- C Ability to override alert
- C Providing too much information
- C Lack of national standards
- C Concerns about overuse of system
- C No single point of contact
- C Determining what signs to activate

What Works

- C Identifying specific points of contact
- C Using standardized guidelines
- C Interstate coordination
- C Using permanent DOT sign locations
- C Ability to activate alarms around the clock

Technologies To Support Activations

Problems and Issues

- C Need for around-the-clock coverage
- C Need for reliable communications
- C No centralized Web site for individual alerts
- C Need for technology updates

What Works

- C 511 system
- C Satellite notifications
- C Co-locate traffic management/law enforcement AMBER
- C Web-based notice
- C Listserv
- C Public /private partnerships
- C Existing DOT communication systems
- C Kiosks
- C Rest areas
- C Highway Advisory Radios
- C EAS
- C Telematics (OnStar, etc)
- C Computer-aided dispatch (CAD) integration
- C Additional resources

Training for Stakeholders

Problems and Issues

- C Need for public education about the difference between AMBER Alerts and terrorism alerts
- C Need for media and transportation involvement and training
- C Lack of training/continuing education, especially for sign operators
- C Need to develop policies
- C Need to explain VMS limitations to law enforcement

What Works

- C DOT best practice form
- C Protocol checklists
- C Operational personnel
- C Additional training
- C Video/PowerPoint training for remote locations
- C Public education
- C Testing /exercise capability
- C Law enforcement training on DOT resources

After-Action Protocol and Reporting

Problems and Issues

- C Determining who is responsible
- C Insuring that transportation is involved in after-action reporting
- C Lack of consistency

What Works

- C Quarterly drills, reports, debriefing, and modification
- C Establishing time limits
- C Documentation
- C Use of critique forms for review and discussion