

AMBER ALERT COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

The following communications plan recommendations were developed as to assist law enforcement agencies with communication's issues when an *Amber Alert* activation occurs in Oregon. The Oregon State Police Public Information Officer (PIO) may be reached through the OSP Northern Command Center or on pager at (503) 323-3195.

Introduction

The activation of an *Amber Alert* is a significant step taken during the investigation of a confirmed child abduction that will generate a high degree of media attention. Because the first few hours are extremely important in the safe recovery of an abducted child, early media involvement can make a critical difference. During these incidents, the media serves as a link between law enforcement and the public making sure timely and accurate information quickly reaches those that will help them be involved in searching for the child.

Recommendations

Following an approval to a request for a statewide *Amber Alert*:

- The requesting agency should develop a news release (see "Activation" draft template for possible format) that will be forwarded to the media in conjunction with the Emergency Alert System (EAS) message. If the requesting agency is unable to prepare a news release, the Oregon State Police Public Information Officer may assist in development and distribution of a news release for the requesting agency. A copy of the news release should be forwarded to the Oregon State Police Public Information Officer who in turn can forward to OSP's Northern Command Center (NCC) and Southern Communications Center (SCC), as well as additional media contacts beyond what may be available to a local agency, to help direct media inquiries to the requesting agency's contact person.

If available, have photos of the victim(s), suspect(s) and vehicle(s) to distribute with any news release(s).

- "The media understands that *Amber Alert* situations are fluid and will change minute by minute. Therefore, the media has a right to expect law enforcement officials to be accessible and provide a method for reporters to verify information gathered during normal newsroom operations. Law enforcement will find it counter-productive to request an *Amber Alert* if no provision is made to communicate with reporters who have legitimate news questions or even information obtained independently. A mechanism should be in place for reporters to communicate to law enforcement any unexpected needs that could arise once an *Amber Alert* has been requested." (Source: *Amber Alert Best Practices Guide for Broadcasters and Other Media Outlets*)

The requesting agency needs to identify a media contact person who would be available to handle media inquiries after the *Amber Alert* activation and news release distribution. Phone and pager (or cell phone) contact information should be listed, helping to prevent calls from the media into the *Amber Alert* tipline while providing the mechanism needed to communicate with law enforcement.

- As the investigation progresses, significant developments should be forwarded to the media for public release through updated news releases and updated alerts. Minor updates may be posted on the web portal through the OSP NCC supervisor without reactivating the alert to subscribed devices.
- Any deactivation of an *Amber Alert* should be announced through the web portal and a news release developed listing any pertinent developments (see draft “Deactivation” template).

Conclusion:

An important piece of the *Amber Alert* plan is tied directly to the quality of the partnership between law enforcement and the media. The focus of an *Amber Alert* should be on the safe recovery of the abducted child. An ineffective communication’s strategy may move the focus from the abducted child to negative information impacting the effectiveness of the *Amber Alert* program.

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