

THE AMBER ADVOCATE

2009 NATIONAL
AMBER[®]
ALERT
SYMPOSIUM

Tampa, Florida
October 27-29

**SYMPOSIUM
PREVIEW, pg. 4**

**AMBER ALERT
INTERNATIONAL, pg. 6**

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WHAT'S IN THIS ISSUE OF **THE AMBERADVOCATE**:

AMBER AT THE SOUTHERN BORDER	PAGE 3
2009 SYMPOSIUM PREVIEW	.....	PAGE 4
ON THE FRONT LINES: YREKA, CA	.....	PAGE 5
AMBER INTERNATIONAL	.....	PAGE 6
PROFILE: DALE ZABRISKIE	.....	PAGE 7
EUROPEAN AMBER PLANS	.....	PAGE 8
AMBER IN INDIAN COUNTRY	.....	PAGE 9
ODDS & ENDS	.....	PAGES 10-11
BEST PRACTICES: TIPS TO MAKE AMBER ALERT PLANS MORE EFFECTIVE	BACK COVER

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Your story ideas and pictures are welcome.

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U.S. AND MEXICO OFFICIALS “ROLL UP SLEEVES” TO MAKE AMBER ALERT PLANS SEAMLESS IN BOTH COUNTRIES

The AMBER Alert is proving to be a catalyst to bring U.S. and Mexican law enforcement officials working together in ways never seen before. Over one hundred local, state, tribal and federal law enforcement officers from the United States and Mexico met in San Diego Aug. 31 to Sept. 1 for the “Southern Border Initiative,” an effort to increase the effectiveness of the AMBER Alert to stop cross border child abductions.

Karen Hewitt, U.S. Attorney for San Diego, said the AMBER Alert can help transcend the 2,000 mile border between the U.S. and Mexico. “We know from living on the border it is two countries---but it is one region and we can come up with shared solutions,” said Hewitt.

Baja California Attorney General Rommel Moreno Manjarrez said barriers between law enforcement agencies in both countries are starting to drop. “Before the AMBER Alert was in place, we had a relationship with police departments but it was not as concrete as it is now.” (See Baja on page 8)

Despite the positive beginnings, Melodee Hanes, Acting Deputy Administrator for Policy at the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, issued a challenge to do more. “We need to roll up our sleeves and have frank and candid dialogues,” said Hanes. “Let’s get to work on what bonds us all - the protection of our children.”

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) reports that Mexico accounts for 47

percent of all international child abductions from the United States. Nevada AMBER Alert Coordinator Bob Fisher said that fact was the main reason he came to the meeting. “The biggest problem we have is that Mexico seems to be the number one place where children are going,” he said.

NCMEC President and CEO Ernie Allen shared six ways children are being harmed along the border:

- Children are being kidnapped and held for ransom.
- Children are being abducted for retaliation or to cause fear.
- Children are being kidnapped for extortion by “coyotes” (people who charge money to take immigrants across the border).
- Children are being abducted and sexually victimized.
- Children are put at risk to help drug dealers find weaknesses in border security.
- Children are being abducted by non-custodial parents and taken across the border.

“These kids are slaves, they are commodities,” said Allen. “I think it’s very clear the problem of transporting children across the border is bigger than we think it is and it is going to grow.”

Meeting participants identified the main obstacles between the countries: language barriers and differences in criteria, technology, knowledge and authority. They also identified goals to overcome those obstacles:

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



ABOVE: NCMEC President and CEO Ernie Allen addressing the executive and general sessions in San Diego
BELOW: Ron Laney, Associate Administrator, Child Protection Division, OJJDP addressing the general session

SOMETHING FOR EVERYBODY AT THE 2009 NATIONAL AMBER ALERT SYMPOSIUM

The 2009 National AMBER Alert Symposium begins October 27 in Tampa, Florida and will offer the very latest tools, technology and strategies to help recover abducted children. The organizers of the three-day symposium relied on surveys to determine what information AMBER Alert partners and professionals from various child protection fields were interested in.

Training sessions were developed for partners working with Indian Tribes, border states and international border issues. The conference will also include a presentation from the Family Roundtable, a discussion involving family members of child abduction victims.

Presentations specifically will target:

- AMBER Alert Coordinators
- Broadcasters and media members
- Child Abduction Response Team (CART) Coordinators and senior law enforcement members
- Family victims of abductions

- Transportation officials
- State Missing Children Clearinghouse directors

"This symposium will have critical information for people who are brand new to the AMBER Alert Program as well as our veteran AMBER Alert partners," said Mary Lou Leary, Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Justice Programs and National AMBER Alert Coordinator.

Awards will be also presented to the AMBER Alert Coordinator of the Year, Broadcaster/Media Person of the Year, AMBER Alert Law Enforcement Leadership Award and the AMBER Alert Citizen Award.

The symposium will include federal, state, tribal and local representatives from the United States as well as international partners from Canada, Mexico and the European Union. ☺



ABOVE: General session of the 2008 National AMBER Alert Conference

LOWER LEFT: Family Roundtable at the 2008 National AMBER Alert Conference LOWER RIGHT: 2008 opening ceremonies



AMBER ALERT PLANS IN THREE STATES ACTIVATED TO SAVE ABDUCTED TODDLER

A late night party turned into a nightmare for parents living in the small Northern California town of Yreka. On March 2, a stranger stopped by the party at the parent's home and later fled with their three-year-old girl.

The victim's father heard his daughter's screams at 4:30 a.m. and saw the man leave in a 1992 Pontiac Grand Am.

Yreka Police Department's Lt. Dave Gamache was contacted and an AMBER Alert was issued at 6:53 a.m. for 22-year-old Kody Lee Kaplon and a small brown-haired girl wearing a tie-dyed t-shirt.

"It was unbelievable" said Lt. Gamache. "I had no

deal with bigger agencies with a lot of resources and this was a small agency and they did an amazing job handling everything that was going on," said Capt. LD Maples, California AMBER Alert Coordinator."

Ironically, Lt. Gamache said his agency had just signed up to take AMBER Alert training the following month. "We have everything but not very much of it," said Lt. Gamache. "I was not going to let pride get in the way of asking for help to find this girl."

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children also called to offer help and immediately sent two agents from Team ADAM.

"The AMBER Alert went very smoothly. Everything happened by the book," said Adrienne Abbott, Nevada Chair for the Emergency Alert System. "The California Highway Patrol, Nevada Highway Patrol and the Yreka Police department were constantly in communication."

The AMBER Alert was working as planned but a three-year-old girl was still missing. Temperatures were dropping, snow was falling and authorities knew they were running out of time to save the girl.

At 2 p.m., the suspect called a designated AMBER Alert phone line to ask police why they were looking for him. Yreka had recently set up a phone bank for natural disasters and officers asked an animal control officer, a secretary and others to handle all of the calls for the alert.

At about the same time, a Yreka officer ran into people panning for gold in the search area and they offered

to drop their pans and start looking for the girl. The volunteer searchers took a 4-wheel-drive vehicle and followed car tracks on a remote dirt road. They found the suspect's abandoned vehicle and discovered the girl hiding in some bushes at 3:21 p.m.

The alert was cancelled three minutes later and Kaplon surrendered to police. The girl told police that the suspect had buried her in the mud and left her but she was able to dig herself out.



Suspect, Kody Lee Kaplon

Lt. Dave Gamache,
Yreka Police Department



idea the AMBER Alert was so simple to use and would be so widespread in such a short period of time. Within 30-minutes after issuing the alert, I was up to my eyeballs with phone calls ringing off the hook. It worked seamlessly."

Since Yreka is close to the Oregon and Nevada borders, the California Highway Patrol asked both states to also issue alerts. The Yreka Police Department had never handled a stranger abduction case and this was the agency's first AMBER Alert. "The thing that sticks out in my mind is that we

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

BAJA CALIFORNIA RISKS EVERYTHING TO BRING AMBER ALERTS TO MEXICO



- Baja California initiated the second alert for a missing boy after receiving intense pressure from the media. The child was found an hour later playing at a friend's house. Investigators later learned that the child had left because he was being abused at home.
- Authorities received a tip that an abducted child was being transported north to the United States. The California Highway Patrol issued an AMBER Alert and the child was recovered in Los Angeles, CA.

"This new generation is trying to find hope. The AMBER Alert will be something positive for our country."

**Rommel Moreno Manjarrez,
Baja California Attorney General**

Baja California Attorney General Rommel Moreno Manjarrez travels with 20 armed body guards while he is in Mexico because his country is at war with the drug cartels. Despite the fact he is always facing imminent danger, he said he wanted to speak at the Southern Border Initiative meeting to let everyone know how the AMBER Alert program is bringing Mexico hope.

"This new generation is trying to find hope," said Manjarrez. "The AMBER Alert will be something positive for our country. The AMBER Alert has to do with the most important thing we have: our children."

Manjarrez was instrumental in setting up the first AMBER Alert program in Mexico on May 13. Baja California authorities were very candid in sharing some of the painful lessons learned during their first experiences with the AMBER Alert:

- Tijuana initiated the first AMBER Alert in Mexico for an 8-year-old boy in June. The alert was cancelled after the victim's body was found in a suitcase. Authorities said the alert led to a tip leading them to the suspect but the media was very critical after the alert was over.

"From the first AMBER Alert, we learned we needed more coordination," said Jesus Quinones Marquez, International Liaison for the Baja Attorney General's Office. "We learned from the second alert not to succumb to peer pressure from the different parties involved."

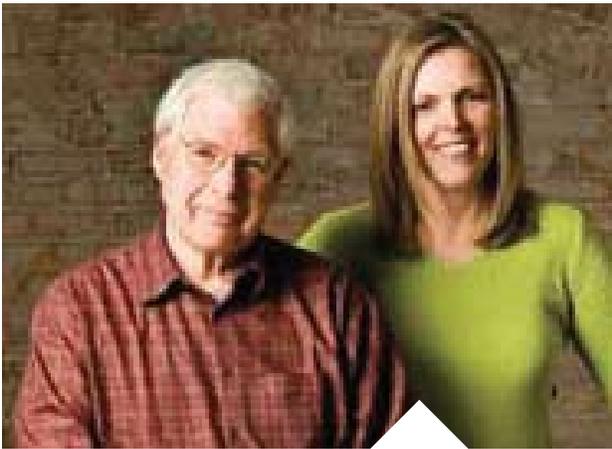
Fox Valley Technical College (FVTC) provided a two-day AMBER Alert technical assistance training session Sept. 1-2 for law enforcement officers and child protection workers in Baja California so they could learn about what has worked and failed in the United States.

"This is the first AMBER Alert training specifically for the needs of a state in Mexico," said Jim Walters, an FVTC consultant. "Some things they do well but they know there are areas they need to work on. It's a work in progress."

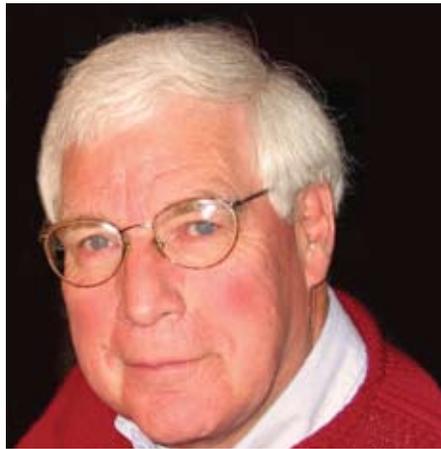
The training included protocols on telecommunications and investigating cases involving missing and abducted children.

"Our mission is to provide the skills to implement and maintain the AMBER Alert program and that it will lead to the recovery of abducted children on either side of the border," said Phil Keith, Program Director for the AMBER Alert Initiative.

The Baja California Attorney General said he shares in that hope. "We had a vision of a program to address the abduction of children," said Manjarrez. "We knew the AMBER Alert had to be a reality here but also in our entire country." 🌟



Dale Zabriskie and daughter Michele



KEEPING BROADCASTERS IN THE PICTURE DURING AMBER ALERTS

Utah Broadcasters Association President Dale Zabriskie says a very persistent Oklahoman helped bring the AMBER Alert to Utah and many other states as well. Carl Smith was the president of the Oklahoma Broadcasters Association and set up the nation's first statewide AMBER Alert Plan. Zabriskie said he remembers Smith pitching the AMBER Alert plan every time he met with his broadcasting colleagues. He said he finally took on the project to get Smith off his back and because it was such a good idea.

"I think it is definitely a noble cause to bring missing and abducted children back to their parents unharmed," said Zabriskie. "We thought obviously this is something we can do in Utah but we realized we couldn't do it by ourselves."

Utah's AMBER Alert Plan was born on April 2, 2002 after a few meetings between Zabriskie and representatives from Utah's Attorney General's Office, Police Chiefs Association, Department of Public Safety Utah and the primary provider for the state's Emergency Alert System.

"It's a perfect win-win situation with police needing help in that type of situation, parents are frantic for whatever help that can be provided and you have this tool from broadcasters that can help," said Zabriskie. "It just had to be organized with the right information to spread the word."

Zabriskie has been spreading the word about AMBER Alerts ever since. He has attended every national and regional conference since the National AMBER Alert Initiative began in 2003.

"We know the AMBER Alert works because the

way people respond to it," said Zabriskie. "They hear it and they bring the child home."

Surprisingly, the long-time broadcaster's career began at a newspaper. Zabriskie was still in college when he started as a sports writer and then a city desk reporter. He went on to work in public relations and was eventually hired as a lobbyist for broadcasters. In 1985 he became the Executive Director of the Utah Broadcasters Association.

Zabriskie believes broadcasters need to be strong partners and said it is vital for them to participate in after-action reviews of each alert. "This is a great way for broadcasters to feel they have a role in the plan and it feeds their enthusiasm for the AMBER Alerts," said Zabriskie.

Broadcasters have also been enlisted by Zabriskie to promote the AMBER Alert plans in other ways, including:

- The Utah Fox-TV affiliate provided all of the production for a state AMBER Alert training DVD.
- The Utah NBC-TV affiliate produced a radio and TV public service announcement for AMBER Alerts that was designed to air in every state.
- Every radio and TV station in Utah has a break room poster that includes a checklist for what a broadcaster should do during an AMBER Alert and an Endangered Person Advisory.
- The Utah Broadcasters Association has sponsored and provided meals and materials for several statewide training sessions for broadcasters and law enforcement public information officers.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

BLOODHOUNDS MULTIPLY AT TRIBAL CART

The Laguna Tribe Child Abduction Response Team quickly went from one bloodhound to many. The AMBER Advocate reported about the New Mexico CART receiving a bloodhound from the Jimmy Ryce Foundation to help in the recovery of missing and abducted children. Another donor gave the CART two more bloodhounds and on Aug. 8 the two newest CART members gave birth to eight puppies. Laguna Tribe Police Investigator, Billy Emanuel, is now giving the puppies away to CARTs or law enforcement agencies. "I have never seen or touched a bloodhound before this and I would not ever consider any other breed again," said Emanuel. 🐾

Interested parties can contact Billy Emanuel at bemanuel@lagunatribe.org or 505-917-4259



8 bloodhounds born August 8



Sadie & Zeus, Laguna Tribal CART Bloodhounds



The Jimmy Ryce Foundation provides AKC bloodhounds free to law enforcement to find abducted & lost children



EUROPEANS CONTINUE TO DEVELOP CHILD ABDUCTION PLANS

European countries are continuing to collaborate and test their child abduction plans to try and make them better. In May, the United Kingdom conducted a national exercise involving five different law enforcement agencies-including one in Scotland-in order to test cross border issues.

"The exercise was incredibly successful and there were many beneficial outcomes which will assist to shape the structure of the National Alert," said Joe Apps, Manager for the U.K. Missing Persons Bureau. "We are planning to carry out further exercises in both Wales and Scotland."

Authorities said they learned about the importance of handling phone calls and having the right software to facilitate calls. They also learned

about managing a case in real time and preparing case papers for prosecutors.

The May training was a follow-up to a British and French exercise held in November 2008. Law enforcement officials said they made many improvements to their system based on the first international training scenario.

The UK Missing Persons Bureau is hoping to receive some funding from the European Commission in order to develop training and technology for a more seamless child abduction alert plan with France, Belgium and the Netherlands. 🐾

(Special thanks to Annette Rutherford, Intelligence Officer for the UK Missing Persons Bureau for providing information for this story)



TRIBES PLAY ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL AMBER ALERTS

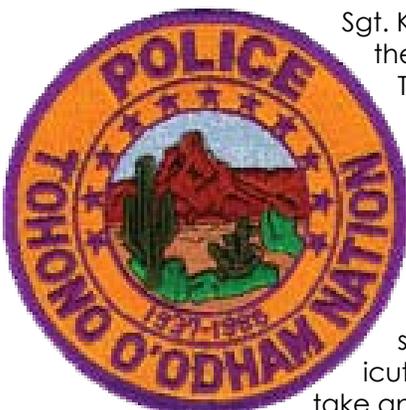
Many AMBER Alert Coordinators know the challenges that can arise when a child abductor takes a victim across a state border. Those difficulties can be compounded if the child is taken across a state border, a tribal reservation border and then across the border into another country - a scenario that is very possible because 30 tribes are situated along the U.S.-Mexico border.

"The issue of tribal lands on border issues is becoming more important," said Jim Walters, FVTC Consultant on the AMBER Alert in Indian Country. "It presents some particular challenges for us."

Walters presented some of the challenges facing border tribes at the Southern Border Initiative meeting in San Diego. He said border tribes are seeing more drugs and children being transported across tribal lands. The cases become even more complicated because of tribal membership laws.

"Parental abductions are complicated by tribal authority and whether parents are both tribal members," said Walters. "It creates a situation where federal, tribal and Mexican authorities have to understand the legal issues."

The U.S. has about 550 tribal communities, nearly 300 with law enforcement agencies. Most tribal agencies are undermanned. Walters said "the solution is to have protocols and relationships in place before an abduction occurs."



Sgt. Karin Ashby works for the Tohono O'odham Tribal Police Department along the Arizona-Mexico border. A total of 85 sworn officers provide law and order for 2.9 million acres of land, roughly the same size of Connecticut. Sometimes it can take an officer more than an hour to respond to a crime and another hour for a back-up officer to arrive.

"The terrain we have to travel is very rough and not very accommodating," said Ashby. "We have very high statistics for travel crimes and abuse against the native people but the people who commit these crimes are not always the native people."



Sgt. Karin Ashby, Tohono O'odham Tribal Police Department

For the most part the Tohono O'odham Tribe does not rely on billboards, electronic signs, the Internet or telephones for communications. "I cannot impose my culture on the people we serve," said Ashby. "We have means of communication but it is more face to face. We spend time getting to know each other."

Ashby shared some of the issues she has faced on the border:

- Rates of violence and victimization are double on tribal communities compared to other communities.
- Delays in reporting missing children because tribal members often believe their family can find the child.
- Children may be transported great distances across the desert.
- The drug trade has led to many children being sexually exploited. One 7-year-old girl was found dead in the desert after she had been sexually assaulted.

"We have our challenges and we have our hurdles," said Ashby. "But we also have many positive aspects."

Walters added that a roadmap is in place to offer more protection for abducted children in border areas. "It's a team effort," said Walters. "We have to open up the lines of communication on the northern side and southern side of the border. By bringing both communities together on both sides of the border, they will be aware of what's going on and know how to respond." ☺

SOUTHERN BORDER, CONT. FROM PAGE 3

- Provide training and a "Best Practices" guide for Mexican states.
- Enhance communication, coordination and infrastructure.
- Increase the use of television, radio and cell phones for AMBER Alerts.
- Partner with top officials and international transportation providers.

Mexican officials said they are ready for the challenge. "This is contagious and I am filled with energy," said Willy Zúñiga Castillo, Agent for the Tamaulipas State Attorney's Office. "I would like to tell you our state is at your disposal and our common guiding light is the well being of our children."

The "Southern Border Initiative" meeting included federal, state and tribal law enforcement and child protection officials from the U.S. and Mexico. The meeting brought together representatives from Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas and Utah in the U.S. and the states of Baja California, Tamaulipas and Chihuahua in Mexico. ☺

FRONT LINES, CONT. FROM PAGE 5

"The recovery was the direct result of the AMBER Alert," said Abbott, and then he asked, "Isn't that the point of the AMBER Alert? You're always thankful when the child is recovered alive. As a parent what else can I say?"

Kaplon is now charged with kidnapping, sexual abuse and cruelty to a child, burglary and attempted murder.

An AMBER Alert, the response of ordinary citizens and a small police department that was not afraid to ask for help, changed what could have been a tragedy into a miracle.

"There were so many pieces of the puzzle I hate to think what would have happened if one of the pieces would have been missing," concluded Lt. Gamache. "I probably will never have another case that makes me feel so good that everything worked." ☺



During the past five years, 381 children reported missing from California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas were recovered in Mexico.

SOURCE: (NCMEC)

LETTERS TO

THE ADVOCATE

Thank you for presenting such an informative [Forensics class in Dallas]. Every instructor was outstanding and a true professional in his/her field. Nothing takes the place of experience and your instructors had it. I am confident that everyone who attended the class left with more knowledge than when they entered. I know I did.

Lt. Joyce M. Pena, Balcones Heights, Texas
Police Department

BROADCASTERS, CONT. FROM PAGE 7

"I'm proud of how we have been innovative," said Zabriskie. "I remember saying (A): No two states will have the same AMBER Alert system and (B): it will always be a work in progress." He said he is grateful Utah did not involve any legislation for its AMBER Alert plan so changes could be made quickly and without any changes in the law.

In his spare time, Zabriskie likes to watch sports, spend time at his cabin and read novels and books about history. He is proud his daughter, Michele, is taking a bigger role in the child abduction alert plan by participating on the Utah AMBER Alert Advisory Committee. Zabriskie said he is counting on others to keep the momentum going. "The challenge would be to continue to respond the way we have and not become complacent." ☺

ANOTHER FAKE AMBER ALERT SPREADS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

A false AMBER Alert text message circulated around the country in July and then resurfaced again in September on text and Twitter. The message claims a three-year-old girl was taken by a man in a silver truck. People reported receiving the alerts in South Dakota, Michigan and Texas. The message reappeared later in California, Missouri, Montana, Ohio and parts of Canada. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children received no AMBER Alert with the information contained in the text. Sioux Falls resident Jennifer McNamara told a reporter she was skeptical because she subscribes to www.wirelessamberalerts.org. "I know what an alert looks like, and I hadn't received one," said McNamara. ☺



Sign up for free AMBER Alert text messages for your area at:

wirelessamberalerts.org

NORTH CAROLINA WOMAN CHARGED FOR AMBER ALERT HOAX

Federal felony charges were filed against a Raleigh, North Carolina woman for reporting that her three-year-old son had been abducted. Rosnah Hassan Thomason told police on May 18, 2008 that the boy was taken from a flea market. Authorities discovered Thomason left the boy with relatives in another state and that the child was actually the woman's nephew. ☺



Rosnah Hassan Thomason and her 3-year-old nephew

PENNSYLVANIA WOMAN WILL GO TO PRISON FOR FAKING CHILD ABDUCTION



A mother has been ordered to serve up to 23 months in prison for claiming her nine-year-old daughter had been abducted. Bonnie Sweeten called 911 and claimed two black men carjacked her car and took her child. Authorities charged her with filing a false police report after they discovered the two actually went to Disney World. ☺

Bonnie Sweeten was sentenced by Bucks County Court of Common Pleas Judge Jeffrey Finley to 9 to 24 months imprisonment, to be followed by 4 years of probation with the completion of 50 hours of community service



BEST PRACTICES: TIPS TO MAKE AMBER ALERT PLANS MORE EFFECTIVE

The AMBER Alert Plan is a unique partnership between law enforcement, media and the public. Each state voluntarily adopts and implements the program based on the Department of Justice's recommended criteria although plans are uniquely designed to address their specific needs.

The Department of Justice has developed a list of best practices to help jurisdictions to continue improving their AMBER Alert plans:



Examine your plan:

Assess the effectiveness of your plan. If you find there are areas that could use improvement, consider methods used by other states that have been successful.



Examine your criteria:

The Department of Justice has developed recommended criteria. Before modifying, ask yourself if it is warranted. Maintaining uniform criteria can assist in creating effective collaboration between states and across borders. Also, familiarizing yourself with the criteria for AMBER Alerts in border states can be helpful in fostering cooperation.



Report statistical data:

Accurate reporting of statistical data serves many purposes:

1. Identifies improvements that may need to be made to the plan.
2. Highlights effectiveness of program.
3. Supports public awareness efforts.



Create public awareness:

Actively educating the public and media on the capabilities of AMBER Alert and how it can help save abducted children is key to community understanding of how the plan works.