



OLR RESEARCH REPORT

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BLUE ALERTS

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You asked for information on Blue Alerts, specifically if any states have adopted it and an example of how a state implemented it.

SUMMARY

Blue Alerts are similar to AMBER Alerts, but have a different purpose. Instead of being used to find missing or endangered children, Blue Alerts are used to alert the public when a law enforcement officer has been killed, seriously injured, or missing, and law enforcement agencies are searching for a suspect who is considered an imminent threat. Blue Alerts not only alert the public of the possible danger, but are also used to solicit the public's assistance in apprehending the suspect.

At least 15 states have passed some form of the Blue Alert legislation. These states include: California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and Washington.

BLUE ALERTS

States implement Blue Alert laws in various ways, but they all have the same general activation criteria. In order for a Blue Alert to be activated, the following criteria must be met:

1. a law enforcement officer has been killed, injured severely, or assaulted with a deadly weapon with the suspect fleeing the crime scene;
2. a law enforcement agency determines the suspect poses an imminent threat; and
3. there is sufficient information available to broadcast to the public for assistance in apprehending the suspect (i.e., description of the suspect's vehicle or license plate number).

Example

Washington recently passed legislation to implement Blue Alerts (2012 Wash. Sess. Laws ch. 37). This law requires law enforcement agencies to implement a Blue Alert system that is consistent with various state laws, including the state's AMBER alert system, Missing Person Clearinghouse, and Endangered Missing Person Advisory Plan.

Under Washington law, law enforcement officers include police officers, the Attorney General and his or her deputies, sheriffs and their regular deputies, correction officers, state and local fire marshals, state Fish and Wildlife agents, and federal law enforcement officers.

The Blue Alert law requires the law enforcement agency with primary jurisdiction over the crime scene to activate the alert system and notify the appropriate participants when the activation criteria are met.

The Blue Alert must include all appropriate information that may help in the suspect's apprehension, including a statement instructing any person with information relating to the incident to contact the agency. The agency must assess the appropriateness of the Blue Alert based on the nature of the suspect and the circumstances of the crime. This means the Blue Alert may be issued in a smaller area than the entire state if it is probable the suspect did not leave a designated geographic area.

The agency must terminate the Blue Alert when it determines the system is no longer an effective tool for locating and apprehending the suspect. The agency must notify other law enforcement agencies, the National Crime Information Center, and the media when it terminates the alert.

The legislation allows agencies to issue regulations to implement the program. This includes procedures to support the investigating law enforcement agency in the:

1. receipt, analysis, and dissemination of information about the suspect and the suspect's location or methods of escape;
2. process for reporting information to media outlets; and
3. procedures for the investigating agency to determine quickly whether an officer has been seriously injured or killed and a Blue Alert must be activated.

DC:ts