

AMBER Alerts

By: Veronica Rose, Chief Analyst
May 19, 2017 | 2017-R-0108

Issue

Describe the circumstances under which AMBER Alerts are issued in Connecticut and the guidelines for issuing them.

AMBER Alerts

AMBER Alerts are issued in suspected or confirmed cases of child abductions. According to the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, for an alert to be issued, (1) the child must be under age 18 (unless there are special circumstances such as a proven mental or physical disability); (2) law enforcement officials must determine the child is in danger of serious bodily harm or death, and they must have enough descriptive information to believe that a broadcast will help; and (3) the information must be received in a timely manner.

If the situation meets these criteria, the local police official contacts the State Police message center, where staff records an audio alert with the information and sends it to (1) state transportation officials for posting on state highway signs and (2) all radio and television stations, each of which airs an emergency tone and then either interrupts programming or scrolls the message at the bottom of the screen, just like they do during severe weather emergencies.

AMBER Alert Program

The program is a voluntary arrangement between law enforcement agencies, broadcasters, and transportation agencies to activate an urgent bulletin in child abduction cases when there is enough information to make the alert effective. It calls for broadcasters to interrupt their programming immediately and broadcast information over the Emergency Alert System about the abduction. Connecticut's AMBER plan was adopted in 2002. It is modeled after the AMBER Plan created by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

The message is also disseminated through other channels, including the state lottery, private digital boards, and text messages.

The AMBER Alert system does not generally cover runaway children or children taken during routine custody disputes. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, stranger abductions are the most dangerous for children and thus are the primary mission of AMBER Alerts.

VR:cym