



*Kern County Sheriff's Office*  
**Policies and Procedures**

<b>TITLE: CHILD ABDUCTION ALERT, (AMBER ALERT)</b>		<b>NO: H-1500</b>	
<b>APPROVED: Donny Youngblood, Sheriff-Coroner</b>			
<b>EFFECTIVE:</b> May 5, 2003	<b>REVIEWED:</b> 10/20/20	<b>REVISED:</b> 03/01/07	<b>UPDATED:</b> 10/20/20

## **INTRODUCTION**

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) has reported that 74% of children murdered by non-family members had been killed within the first three hours of their abduction. Reporting of missing children is often delayed by at least two hours for various reasons, compounding the critical importance of rapid response.

In 1996, nine-year-old Amber Hagerman was kidnapped and murdered in Arlington, Texas. The news of this abduction and murder outraged the community. Concerned individuals contacted local media and together they developed a system to broadcast special alerts over the airwaves to help locate abducted children. This became known as the Amber alert system. The NCMEC uses AMBER as an acronym for America's Missing Broadcast Emergency Response. Many communities across this nation now use an AMBER-type system under several different names; however, the functions are essentially the same.

The State of California has implemented legislation instituting guidelines for a statewide AMBER plan to ensure the timely notifications of media and the public in the event of an abduction (Gov't Code 8594).

## **Legislative Mandates**

Under Government Code 8594 (a), "If an abduction has been reported to a law enforcement agency and the agency determines that a child 17 years of age or younger, or an individual with a proven mental or physical disability, has been abducted and is in imminent danger of serious bodily injury or death, and there is information available that, if disseminated to the general public, could assist in the safe recovery of the victim, the agency, through a person authorized to activate the Emergency Alert System, shall, absent extenuating investigative needs, request activation of the Emergency Alert System within the appropriate local area. Law enforcement agencies shall only request activation of the Emergency Alert System for an abduction if these requirements are met. The Emergency Alert System is not intended to be used for abductions resulting from custody disputes that are not reasonably believed to endanger the life or physical health of a child."

## **POLICY**

It will be the policy of the Kern County Sheriff's Office to activate an AMBER alert when it is reasonable to believe the state guidelines are met. The following directives will be followed to activate an AMBER alert for the Kern County Sheriff's Office.

## **DIRECTIVE A ACTIVATION OF A CHILD ABDUCTION ALERT NOTIFICATION**

In cases of apparent child abduction, a field supervisor will be dispatched in addition to patrol personnel. The supervisor will be responsible to determine the potential need for a Child Abduction Alert, and ensure that the abduction criteria is met and all pertinent information is obtained for distribution. In the event a field supervisor is not readily available, the on-scene deputy will be the investigating deputy and cause immediate notification and briefing of available information concerning the abduction to the Watch Lieutenant, or in absence of a Watch Lieutenant, the Investigations Division Commander. The investigating deputy, in the absence of a supervisor, will ensure the Alert protocol is completed.

Generally, the following criteria should be met before an Alert is initiated:

- Law Enforcement confirms a child has been abducted, 17 years of age or younger, or a proven mental or physical handicapped person regardless of age.
- Law Enforcement believes the circumstances surrounding the abduction indicate that the victim is in imminent danger of serious bodily injury or death. Absent unusual conditions, parental or family abductions will not fit the criteria without further indication of imminent danger.
- There must be enough descriptive information about the victim, abductor, and suspect's vehicle to believe an immediate broadcast alert to the public will assist in the safe recovery of the victim.

In the event an Abduction Alert appears necessary, the supervisor will brief the Watch Lieutenant. If no Watch Lieutenant is available, the Investigations Division Commander will be contacted. In the unlikely event, a Watch Commander or Investigations Division Commander is not available, the affected Division Commander, as well as the on-call Detective Sergeant will be contacted. Prior to an Abduction Alert being activated, the Investigations Division Commander or his/her designee will be consulted to determine when the alert should be activated in coordination with other Bureaus. At the very least, a local broadcast should be initiated to affected law enforcement agencies in the Kern County area pending the activation of an Abduction Alert.

The Investigations Division Commander or his/her designee will determine if a detective response is needed. If determined that a detective response is needed, the Investigations Division Commander will assume command of the investigative activities. A Detective Sergeant will be assigned to lead the investigation. The Detective Sergeant in charge of the investigation will assign sufficient detectives and resources to the investigation. The Detective Sergeant will assign duties to personnel on the investigative team as the situation dictates and ensure the incident is investigated following current, accepted policy and investigative procedures. The Detective Sergeant will coordinate with the field supervisor on who is responsible for writing reports.

The Investigations Division Commander will determine if there is a need to activate the Sheriff's

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Office Operations Center and or phone banks. The Investigations Division Commander will then determine the level of staffing needed based on the circumstances known at that time.

The Alert will utilize the Emergency Alert System (EAS), the Emergency Digital Information System (EDIS), Kern County Broadcasters Association, Kern Alert, Technology to Recover Abducted Kids (TRAK), Cal Trans signage, notifications of local law enforcement agencies, and the e-mail news release system.

Prior to information being disseminated to the public, a Public Information Officer must be identified with a contact phone number available. Case sensitive information should not be made available for public dissemination.

To activate the EAS for an Abduction Alert, the incident supervisor will ensure that the Communications Center Supervisor is contacted and provided with the descriptive information regarding the incident, victim, suspect, suspect vehicle, our agency, and agency phone number. The Communications Center Supervisor will immediately contact the Fire Emergency Communications Center Supervisor and request a Child Abduction Alert be immediately accomplished utilizing local EAS. The Fire Emergency Communications Center will activate an alert, which will be transmitted to media outlets and local OES contacts simultaneously.

If Kern County OES is unavailable, contact KUZZ AM/FM radio as a back up system.

When using KUZZ, it will be audible. Use the following format; “This is (your name and title) or (organization). I request that the Emergency Alert System be activated because of a (give information on the alert).”

In your general information include a short description of the case, the victim’s information, any suspect information, vehicle information, location last seen, time element, a phone number to call, and a contact name. The message must be limited to one minute. DO NOT include any confidential or case sensitive information.

To send an EDIS message via CLETS, the incident supervisor will ensure the following steps are taken as soon as possible:

- Contact the Records Section Teletype operator or on duty clerk (24 hours) to send a CLETS Be-On-The-Look-Out (BOLO) administrative message via CLETS. The clerk will ensure that the message is transmitted without delay. The message will be directed to Group Code 4500 (AMBER Alert Users Group). The first line of the text will read, EDIS FLASH, followed by “CHILD ABDUCTION ALERT”. The message of the text should contain a brief description of the incident and all available physical descriptions of the victim, suspect and vehicle, along with our agency name, contact name, and phone number. Text entered after the key phrase EDIS FLASH

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will automatically be forwarded to designated media outlets exactly as it was entered via CLETS and to all law enforcement agencies statewide.

- In addition, a BOLO Administrative Message via CLETS should continue to be transmitted in the prescribed format to initiate a regional law enforcement response to reported missing person cases, pursuant to Penal Code section 14205(a).
- The Kern County Broadcasters Association will be contacted to ensure local media is contacted. To activate the KCBA, call 661-328-6737. This is an answering service. The information given at this time will be sent via message pages to the media associated with KCBA.
- Kern Alert will be activated by the Sheriff's Communications Center. This will make notification to personnel and agencies not necessarily related to law enforcement but could be of assistance in the investigation.
- The Communications Supervisor will ensure that all local law enforcement agencies are contacted to accomplish an immediate local broadcast in compliance with Penal Code 14205(a), per current protocol.
- The Commander or ranking investigator will, if needed, request a Cal Trans signage alert for the Child Abduction by contacting the California Highway Patrol locally or through ENTAC 916-421-2921.
- The Communications Supervisor will make notifications to the affected Division Commander, the Field Operations Chief Deputy, Undersheriff, and the Sheriff.

The TRAK is a fax-based system that the Sheriff's Office has joined to allow us to send and receive faxes of photographs and information from other law enforcement agencies across the nation. The TRAK system is located at Sheriff's Headquarters in the Crime Analysis Unit. If a TRAK is needed during normal business hours the Crime Analysis Unit can be contacted to develop the flyer and make a local, state, or nationwide distribution to the TRAK subscribers. If TRAK is needed other than normal business hours the Crime Analyst may be contacted to respond to Headquarters to assist. If the Crime Analyst is not available the Crime Analysis Data Entry Operator may be contacted to respond.

As timely as possible, with the Investigations Division Commander's approval, the incident supervisor will cause to be sent an email news release with the previously described information. This email is sent to the local media only.

## **DIRECTIVE B CANCELLATION OF AN AMBER ALERT**

Any updates or cancellations of an AMBER Alert should be sent to all affected agencies in a timely fashion. Transmit the appropriate information via CLETS in the form of an EDIS FLASH, using the same format as originally specified. The cancellation of an Amber Alert will be approved by the Investigations Division Commander or his/her designee.

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**DIRECTIVE C RECEIPT OF AN AMBER ALERT NOTIFICATION**

Upon receipt of an AMBER Alert from another agency, the Communications Center will ensure a broadcast is immediately issued. Existing protocol for the distribution of the broadcast will be followed. However, copies of the Alert will be sent to the Investigations Division Commander, SAAIU Sergeant, and any individual Division Commander that the Communications Center Supervisor deems necessary.

If the Teletype Operator from the Records Section receives an Alert, the Communications Center will be immediately be notified by telephone, and if needed, the information will be forwarded to the Communications Center Supervisor. Copies of the Teletype will be sent to the Investigations Division Commander, SAAIU Sergeant, and any other affected Division Commander as deemed necessary.

**DIRECTIVE D REQUEST TO ACTIVATE EAS BY ALLIED AGENCY**

In the event that another law enforcement agency in Kern County contacts the Communications Center Supervisor to request an AMBER Alert EAS broadcast, the Supervisor will take the information from the agency and immediately have the Fire Department-OES activate the EAS for the local area.

The supervisor will make courtesy notification to the on-duty Watch Lieutenant and also make notification to the Investigations Division Commander.

In the event that the Fire-OES in unable to activate the EAS, the agency will be referred to the secondary EAS which is KUZZ radio.

**CONCLUSION**

It is the intent of the Kern County Sheriff’s Office to provide a rapid response to the most serious child abductions and to safely recover the victims and apprehend criminal suspects. The assistance of allied agencies, the media, and the public is vital to this goal. It should be noted that the public is being requested to call 911 or another designated number to report information, and in no way, is the public being asked to take any law enforcement action.

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