



AMBER Alert: A History of the National Initiative

The AMBER Alert System began in Dallas-Fort Worth when broadcasters teamed with local police to develop an early warning system to help find abducted children. AMBER stands for America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response. The acronym was created as a legacy to 9-year-old Amber Hagerman, who was kidnapped while riding her bicycle in Arlington, Texas, and then brutally murdered. Other states and communities began setting up their own AMBER Alert plans as the idea was adopted across the Nation.

From 1996 through 2001, the progress on developing and implementing AMBER plans throughout the country was slow to develop; at the end of 2001, only four states had statewide AMBER plans.

In 2002, the first ever White House Conference on Missing, Exploited, and Runaway Children. AMBER Alert became nationally focused. In conjunction with the conference, the President requested that the U.S. Attorney General appoint the first National AMBER Alert Coordinator. Deborah J. Daniels, Assistant Attorney General for the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs was appointed the first National AMBER Alert Coordinator.

On April 30, 2003, the President signed into law the PROTECT Act, which comprehensively strengthened law enforcement's ability to prevent, investigate, prosecute, and punish violent crimes committed against children. The PROTECT Act codified the previously-established National AMBER Alert Coordinator role in the Department of Justice. The law tasked the Coordinator to: facilitate the development of the AMBER network; support development of state AMBER plans and efforts; help eliminate geographic gaps in AMBER networks; and provide regional AMBER network coordination. Establish guidance on criteria for issuing an AMBER Alert.

In 2004, guidance was provided to law enforcement, broadcasters, transportation officials, and the public on AMBER Alert activation criteria. The Department of Justice does not mandate one set of criteria; however, as directed by the PROTECT Act and at the request of state coordinators, the Department developed and shared its suggested criteria for the issuance of AMBER Alerts. The guidance is designed to create a uniform, interoperable network of plans across the country and minimize potentially deadly delays due to confusion among varying jurisdictions.

The Department's recommended criteria for issuing AMBER Alerts are as follows. Most states' guidelines adhere closely to the U.S. Department of Justice's recommended guidelines.

- Law enforcement must confirm that an abduction has taken place.
- The law enforcement agency believes that the child is in imminent danger of serious bodily injury or death.
- There is enough descriptive information about the victim and the abduction for law enforcement to issue an AMBER Alert to assist in the recovery of the child.
- The child must be 17 years old or younger.

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- The child's name and other critical data elements, including the Child Abduction flag, have been entered into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) system.

By February 2005, Hawaii had become the 50th state to complete its statewide AMBER Alert plan, creating a network of plans nationwide. In May 2005, the Department of Justice joined the wireless industry and other government officials to announce that wireless users can opt to receive geographically specified AMBER Alert messages on their wireless devices through an AMBER Alert wireless messaging system. In November 2005, the Department launched an initiative to train Child Abduction Response Teams (CART) nationwide, designed to assist local law enforcement agencies responding to incidents of missing and abducted children. CART can be used for all missing children's cases; it can be deployed as part of an AMBER Alert, or when a child is abducted or missing but the abduction or disappearance does not meet the AMBER Alert criteria.

On May 25, 2006, the Department of Justice, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) and the Wireless Foundation teamed up with the Ad Council to launch a national, multi-media public service campaign, including radio, newspaper, outdoor and Internet advertising to encourage the public to sign up to receive wireless AMBER Alerts. On July 19, 2006, the Department announced that it had initiated talks with tribal leaders to bring AMBER Alert to Indian Country to create a seamless AMBER Alert network nationwide.

On September 14, 2007, as part of the U.S. Department of Justice AMBER Alert in Indian Country Initiative, ten Tribal sites were selected to serve as demonstration sites for other Native American communities. NCMEC, the authorized agent of the Department of Justice responsible for the secondary distribution of AMBER Alerts, established a partnership with MySpace and the Transportation Security Administration to expand the secondary distribution network.

In May 2008, the Outdoor Advertising Association of America (OAAA) joined the AMBER Alert secondary distribution network.

By 2009, all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands have AMBER Alert plans. The AMBER Alert system has also been adopted in the Canadian provinces and continues to expand into the Mexican border states.

In 2011, AMBER Alert Facebook pages are created for each state as well as a national page, allowing the dissemination of alerts to Facebook users.

On October 31, 2012, Google integrates AMBER Alerts into their Public Alerts service and search engine. On December 18, 2012, an AMBER Alert notification is sent for the first time using the Wireless Emergency Alerts system.

On January 1, 2013, the Wireless Emergency Alerts system for AMBER Alerts officially begins. On January 13, 2013, AMBER Alerts go live on Twitter using the handle @AMBERAlert. In February 2013, an 8-month-old child is abducted from his home. A teenager saw the Wireless Emergency Alert message and notified her father, resulting in the first successful rescue of a child due to the Wireless Emergency Alerts system.

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On April 7, 2014, a technology forum is held at NCMEC with industry leaders resulting in the development of the Federation for Internet Alerts, increasing the coverage of AMBER Alerts on the Internet. On May 26, 2014, the Official launch of Mexico's official AMBER Alert website: <http://www.alertaamber.gob.mx/> during the Alerta AMBER Forum in Mexico City is made.

On January 13, 2015, Facebook expands their AMBER Alert resources and begins pushing alerts to people near the area where the child went missing. Bing integrates AMBER Alerts into their search engine function. On March 3, 2013, Google integrates AMBER Alerts into the Waze traffic app.

On May 7, 2015, Jamaica held an international conference during Missing Children Awareness Week to coordinate efforts between countries to recover missing and abducted children. Jamaica has a child abduction alert called the "Ananda Alert" and has increased efforts to work with countries in Latin America and the Caribbean to make sure missing and abducted children return home safely. There are 4,394 children who have been reported missing in Jamaica between January 2013 and March 2015.

In 2016, the AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program (AATTAP) fully launches its new Tribal Database website (<https://www.tribaldatabase.org>) which features information and resources important to the work of tribal communities in the areas of child protection, human trafficking and other aspects of law enforcement, public safety and social services. The Tribal Database website also offers direct access to the secure Tribal Database System designed for use by all Federally-recognized tribes

By January 2017, more than 22,500 participants have received more than 402,880 hours of AATTAP onsite training. Additionally, 23,000 participants completed distance learning courses with AATTAP as of January 2017, receiving more than 94,000 hours of online training.