

# THE AMBER ADVOCATE

ISSUE 1 2021

## KEEPING AMBER ALERT TRAINING ALIVE DURING COVID-19



**AMBER<sup>®</sup>**  
**ALERT**

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Your story ideas and pictures are welcome.

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# AMBER ALERT TRAINING

## DURING COVID-19



## Virtual training keeps the mission of the AMBER Alert Program alive amidst the COVID-19 pandemic

AATTAP offers virtual, instructor-led live training through virtual platforms to ensure child protection professionals' needs are served.

A law enforcement officer from Arizona engages in a highly involved conversation with another officer from Washington about an ongoing child abduction case. An Idaho therapist and a New Jersey prosecutor weigh in during a breakout training session in which the best approach to bring the child home safely is discussed.

Across multiple disciplines such as law enforcement, child advocacy and social services, these professionals are taking part in the latest virtual, instructor-led live training (VILT) opportunity offered by the AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program (AATTAP).

Across states, time zones, and various 'work environments' (home office, kitchen table, and bedrooms-turned office) created by stay-at-home and physical-distancing precautions, interactive training through virtual collaboration platforms such as Zoom is proving to be an

absolute lifeline. Virtual training events are helping to maintain and improve knowledge and skills, despite the inability to gather in person for classroom-based training.

In response to pandemic-driven shutdowns and travel restrictions, AATTAP began developing VILT courses based on current classroom curriculum, with its first virtual training delivered in early fall 2020.

AATTAP's self-paced eLearning courses, available for 24/7 access via the National Criminal Justice Training Center at Fox Valley Technical College's (NCJTC-FVTC) Blackboard online learning platform, were already in play and very popular with law enforcement and public safety professionals across the country. An information campaign was ramped up in early spring 2020 to boost awareness of those offerings and to ensure training and resource

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# AMBER ALERT TRAINING DURING COVID-19

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sharing continued uninterrupted as the challenges of COVID-19 emerged.

During the 4th quarter of 2020, ten VILT events were offered across three courses:

- Child Abduction Tabletop Exercise (CATE) scenario-based training;
- Community Response to High Risk Missing Victims; and
- Initial Response Strategies and Tactics When Responding to Missing Children Incidents.

Additional course offerings are already in development for 2021.

## Evolution in Training

For more than 16 years, the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) has been offering AMBER Alert training to tens of thousands of child protection professionals through FVTC with a focus on in-person teaching—until now.

“For obvious reasons, in-person training, conferences and meetings were impacted early on,” said Jim Walters, AATTAP Program Administrator. “This required a change in our business processes. One thing hasn’t changed: we are still working to improve the way we all do what we do to safely recover an abducted child.”

AATTAP Program  
Manager Byron Fassett

has coordinated the addition of VILT courses by leading specific subject matter project teams. He notes how the first course delivered via Zoom concerning high-risk missing victims was ultimately as much of a learning experience for the instructors as it was for the students.

“We used it as a trial to see what is needed to convert the curriculum to an online environment,” said Fassett. “We also had to help our instructors to engage with students so we could make it as close to a classroom setting as possible. We have had to think outside the box, not letting the virtual delivery method limit us.”

The addition of VILT courses makes it possible for participants to better engage through discussions around polls, breakout rooms, and other interactive activities, with the ability to hear others’ voices and see facial expressions. This approach offers added learning and practical application benefits beyond the more passive ‘watch and listen’ framework of traditional webinars.

Noting the importance of this level of engagement through virtual training, Fassett added “I can read people’s faces. I can engage people very easily within a classroom environment.

People retain some information from the spoken word, but they are better at recalling instructions



AATTAP Program Manager Byron Fassett

when they can see an instructor's delivery and movements."

The instructors, moderator, and behind-the-scenes support team, comprised of AATTAP staff and associates, utilize pre-event 'full dress rehearsals' to ensure no aspect of the live event administration goes untested beforehand. The entire team also meets after each event to carefully review and discuss what did and did not work, making sure improvements are made for future training events.

"We need to make sure the classes work for everyone because we have such a diverse mix of law enforcement officers, social workers, teachers and other professionals," added Fassett.

### **Modifying Courses**

AATTAP Associate and Region One Liaison Yesenia 'Jesi' Leon-Baron uses her years of experience as a special agent for the Florida Department of Law Enforcement to offer real-life examples for the multidisciplinary groups during VILT events. Leon-Baron and other instructors have a clear understanding that students likely have more distractions at home than they do in an actual classroom training environment.

"You have to be energetic and engage the class," said Leon-Baron. "This is such a hard situation for all of us, especially for somebody who has been in front of the computer all day doing other things with work or other meetings. We have to make sure our training is worth their time and give them the

opportunity to gain knowledge and grow their skill sets to help vulnerable children."

The VILT courses are delivered in both single and multi-day formats, offering child protection professionals options which best fit their demanding and varied schedules during these unprecedented times. The events reference and offer access to digital resources that can be used during and following the training.



*AATTAP Associate and Region One Liaison Yesenia 'Jesi' Leon-Baron*

During the event, visual training materials focus on a clean, conceptual design which delivers key information while not overwhelming participants with details, allowing them to focus on the instructors as well as

having a discussion with other participants.

Students can speak up or use the chat function on Zoom to make comments or ask questions. Instructors also remain online for a bit following each session to address additional questions or comments not covered during class.

As with AATTAP's in-person training, the VILT courses offer instruction, case study examples, and interactive scenarios delivered by subject matter experts as well as family members who have experienced the tragedy of a child abduction and/or exploitation. AATTAP CART Program Coordinator Derek VanLuchene fits in both of these important categories.

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# AMBER ALERT ON THE FRONT LINES:

## UTAH'S NEWLY FINE-TUNED AMBER ALERT PLAN HELPS RECOVER INFANT FROM STRANGER ABDUCTION

It took only moments for ten-month-old Amila Spratley-Apkey to vanish. Amila's mother Breesha Spratley left her car running in the driveway with her daughter in the backseat in Ogden, Utah, at 10:45 a.m. on November 4, 2020. The mother ran into her home to use the bathroom and her friend who was in the car also decided to go into the house.

When the mother returned, her car and infant daughter were gone.

Spratley called 911 for help. The Ogden City Police Department determined the situation met the criteria for an AMBER Alert and began gathering as much information as possible before initiating an alert.

Ogden Police Department Technical Agency Coordinator (TAC) Angie Turner entered the alert into the Utah Department of Public Safety's Utah Criminal Justice Information System (UCJIS) at 11:16 a.m. The alert was



*(Above) Utah Department of Public Safety (DPS) Criminalist Alex Martinez  
(Below) Utah Department of Public Safety (DPS) Criminalist Ofa Vaisima*



activated just moments later at 11:30 a.m.

Utah Department of Public Safety (DPS) Criminalists Ofa Vaisima and Alex Martinez began their positions as AMBER Alert co-coordinators just two months earlier in September. Vaisima was the on-call coordinator November 4th and issued the alert to law enforcement agencies, businesses, Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT), Utah Trucking Association, and all media outlets.

A Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) also sent details about the abduction to all cellphones in Utah. The wireless alerts reach approximately three million cellphones throughout the state.

Ogden Police Captain Timothy Scott set up the Area Tactical Analysis Center (ATAC) and briefed dispatchers about the

potential for an overwhelming number of tips.

"Cases like this involving non-family or unknown suspects heighten the concern significantly," said Ogden Police Captain

Jacob Sube. "It becomes imperative to locate the child as soon as possible to reduce the risk of harm. We also had concerns of the child being abandoned in the cold or being physically harmed by the suspect."

Investigators on scene continued gathering information from interviews and shared their updates with the police command center.

### **Citizens Respond**

Mindy Michelle and her sister, Tiffany Bingham, saw the AMBER Alert on their cellphones and decided to help with the search for the missing infant. "I was just bawling because I felt so drawn to this Amber Alert," Bingham told a Deseret News reporter.

The two sisters spotted a car without a license plate that matched the missing vehicle. "I don't know how, but I knew that that was the car, and I knew she was in this neighborhood," added Michelle.

They called 911, started looking for the baby on their own, and ultimately heard a baby crying. They found the infant on a porch in their neighborhood, but the car was nowhere in sight. "I just grabbed the car seat, and I picked her up," Michelle said, "and I said, 'Hi, baby!'"

When Ogden police officers arrived, they found one sister cuddling the child and the other one on the phone with a 911 dispatcher.

"The two women who participated in the locating and safekeeping of this child are prime examples of how important it is to be observant of your environment," said Ogden Police Officer Nigel Bailey. "They realized the seriousness of the situation and acted quickly and appropriately to keep this child safe."

In the meantime, a DPS helicopter spotted the missing car and began following it. Officers from the Ogden Police Department and Weber County Sheriff's Office began a pursuit and eventually arrested a 20-year-old man and a 34-year-old woman at 12:30 p.m. The AMBER Alert was canceled at 12:51 p.m.



*Breasha Spratley is reunited with her daughter, Amila Spratley-Apke*

Vaisima breathed a sigh of relief and felt gratitude for the two sisters who responded to the alert.

"Their quick thinking and effort ensured the safe recovery of the child," said Vaisima. "We are also grateful to all the other citizens who contacted the police with tips and information."

### **Improving Utah's AMBER Alert**

The arrests and safe recovery are an important milestone for what has been a whirlwind year for the Utah AMBER Alert program. This AMBER Alert was the seventh in 2020; the highest number of alerts Utah has ever issued in a single year. All seven alerts resulted in safe recoveries.

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# AMBER ALERT IN INDIAN COUNTRY

## SAFETY FIRST: THE NAVAJO NATION FINDS SUCCESS WITH ITS FIRST INDEPENDENTLY ISSUED AMBER ALERT.

### “Thankfully, we were prepared.”

On Nov. 25, 2020, the Navajo Nation AMBER Alert faced its first real test – and aced it. The AMBER Alert led to two young sisters being safely returned to their home in northwest New Mexico, and that left Navajo Nation Department of Emergency Management Harlan Cleveland breathing yet another sigh of relief. Three years of intense planning, training, and testing for just such a day had paid off.

Prior to November 25, Cleveland and his team had practiced issuing the child recovery alert in a simulated lab environment. “We were wondering how it would go in real-time,” he shared. “Thankfully, we were prepared.”

Also thankful is the family of Jayda John, 7, and Jaylee Spencer, 14.

On Saturday, November 21, the girls were taken from their uncle’s home in Fort Defiance, New Mexico, without his knowledge or permission. His girlfriend, Kristy Marie Pinal, had taken his car, and his nieces, to visit her parents several hours away on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation in Whiteriver, Arizona; that is what Pinal told him when reached by cell phone. She also

said she would return with the girls the next day.

But Sunday came and went, and Pinal was not responding to calls and voicemails. By Monday November 23, Jayda and Jaylee’s family reported them missing to the Navajo Nation Police Department in Window Rock, New Mexico.

*“One of the most eye-opening questions we ask family members at events is, ‘Do you know what clothing your child is wearing today?’ Chances are the answer is no,” Willie-Nez said. “We ask, ‘How quickly could you give us a current photo of your child? Do you know their height and weight?’ It’s difficult to think about planning for these things, but they happen, so we have to be prepared for them.”*

In issuing a Missing and Endangered Persons Advisory, Cleveland and Deputy Emergency Management Director Lavina Willie-Nez worked with the Navajo Nation Public Information Officer (PIO) to create a flyer that could be shared far and wide – on

social media and at well-traveled locations throughout the reservation. Reaction to the girls’ disappearance gained attention, but no leads, and by the next day, Navajo Nation Police Department investigators filed kidnapping charges against Pinal.

An AMBER Alert – the first for Cleveland’s team to independently issue – would be needed. And quickly. Although Cleveland and Willie-Nez were working in separate locations in different states that day, they got the job done. “The good thing about our system is that it’s cloud-based, which allows us to respond instantly, wherever we are.”



*Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye is joined by NDEM Director Harland Cleveland, Vice President Jonathan Nez, Chief of Police Phillip Francisco and DPS Director Jesse Delmar.*

Communicating by cell phone, with open laptops at the ready, Cleveland and alert co-coordinator Willie-Nez confirmed the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) had the necessary information to push out the AMBER Alert to two states simultaneously. The AMBER Alert needed to go statewide in New Mexico and Arizona; the states in which Pinal and the girls were likely traveling.

With every minute holding the very lives of the missing girls in hand, Willie-Nez recalled her resolved mindset. “There’s no panicking in this line of work. We’re trained to get it done.”

After working with AMBER Alert Coordinators in New Mexico and Arizona to finalize alert elements, the AMBER Alert was activated, notifying citizens via their phones and other devices. “It was great to see how quickly the alert went out,” remarked Willie-

Nez. Social media activity around the alert and case rose quickly as well.

Within 30 minutes, the girls were found safe, some 50 miles west of Window Rock, by a Navajo Nation public safety officer. Pinal was arrested and the girls were returned home to a greatly relieved family. The case remains under investigation.

In the debrief following the AMBER Alert, Cleveland and Willie-Nez identified a few small internal adjustments that could be made toward improved process efficacy with future alerts. In concluding their overall review of their AMBER Alert response and with having identified those process improvements, they feel good about their progress and readiness.

“We’re thankful to have budgeted for a system with all the bells and whistles, one that doesn’t leave us without add-on

Continued on next page

# AMBER ALERT IN INDIAN COUNTRY

capabilities that we didn't know we needed until we did," Cleveland said.

While the Navajo Nation's first AMBER Alert ended on a high note, the roots of their mass-notification system were born from a tragedy – the May 2016 abduction and murder of 11-year-old Ashlynnne Mike.

The anguish over Ashlynnne's disappearance intensified after it was discovered that a series of miscommunications around jurisdictional issues had delayed the issuance of an AMBER Alert. In response, the Navajo Nation vowed never to let such a situation occur in the future. And Tribal Nations throughout the country realized that, like the Navajo Nation, they needed to enact their own comprehensive child recovery strategy.

Foundational to the heart of Tribal communities working to make that happen was the passage of the 2018 Ashlynnne Mike AMBER Alert in Indian Country Act, championed by Ashlynnne's mother, Pamela Foster, and the late Arizona Senator John McCain. The Act gives Tribal Nations access to state AMBER Alert plans, provides federal grants to support related technology and training, and serves as the catalyst for the AMBER Alert in Indian Country initiative. As Tribal Communities and Nations partner with their states, either in utilizing the state AMBER Alert plan or adopting and operationalizing their own plans, the overarching result is clear: the continued growth and strengthening of the nationwide network of law enforcement, public safety, media, transportation, citizens, and numerous organizations working in partnership to bring endangered, missing, and abducted children safely home.

## **Building the Navajo Network**

Building and maintaining an emergency

communications network that would effectively serve the nation's largest Indian reservation has been a gargantuan undertaking. First among the challenges was the sheer size of the reservation, a geographically diverse region spanning 11 counties in New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah; comprising a total 27,000 square miles (about the size of West Virginia).

Additionally, without its own plan and procedures, the Navajo Nation would need to contact each AMBER Alert Coordinator in the three adjoining states to provide information for AMBER Alert and IPAWS notifications. "We couldn't risk any delay that might cause," Cleveland said. "We had to have our own system."

Building an emergency alert system that integrated IPAWS took a few years, but thanks to a unique Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Navajo Nation now has the authority to access IPAWS to issue AMBER Alerts. It also has the capability to push out non-emergency alerts (e.g., for COVID-19, traffic, and weather) via radio, television, and instant messaging.

In finding a platform that could not only integrate IPAWS but also provide personalization, Cleveland, his team, and a Navajo Nation task force comprised of law enforcement and public safety officers, as well as civic and community leaders, spent countless hours evaluating 40-plus vendor products for their capabilities and effectiveness. Ultimately, they chose Everbridge, and "so far so good," Cleveland said.

The Nation's mass-notification system, approved in December 2018 and launched a year later, is overseen by the Navajo

Division of Public Safety (NDPS) and managed by the Navajo Department of Emergency Management (NDEM). To stay on their game, Cleveland and his team participate in monthly meetings with Everbridge and FEMA while also hosting beginner-level webinar training sessions for new Navajo Nation law enforcement officers.

While the idea of future missing and abducted child incidents is never easy to consider, Cleveland and Willie-Nez understand it is inevitable. This is what drives their daily work and never-ending

commitment to being prepared to respond – swiftly and effectively. They will be ready for it, they said.

“As a mother, I can’t even imagine how I’d feel if one of my children went missing,” shared Willie-Nez. “When a child’s life is on the line, all of us know we have to get the word out to as many people possible, as quickly as possible.”

When searching for the perpetrator of an abduction, “Anybody can be everywhere,” she said. “That’s why the public has to be our eyes and ears.”

## SOUND ADVICE

**An independently operated mass notification system is well suited to the Navajo Nation due to its vast size and ample resources, but it may not be feasible for most Tribal Nations.** Harlan Cleveland and Lavina Willie-Nez of the Navajo Nation Department of Emergency Management offer these tips for Tribes working to create a solid communications plan:

- Work with your state’s AMBER Alert Coordinator to build from existing AMBER Alert programs. Any Tribal leaders who are reticent about tapping into state/national resources and expertise “should consider that at the end of the day, it’s not about us, it’s about our children,” Willie-Nez said.
- Learn what criteria your state’s AMBER Alert program needs to ensure your alert goes out quickly and accurately. Also make sure law enforcement, public safety leaders, and community members know what is required so that families can be prepared.
- Assess your technological strengths and weaknesses. Do the cellular or broadband service/wireless transmitters in your community/area need updating?
- Participate in training whenever possible. Ask FEMA to provide an IPAWS tutorial. Also take courses provided by the AMBER Alert in Indian Country (AIIC)/AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program (AATTAP) and the National Criminal Justice Training Center. “Both paint a really good picture of what’s required,” Cleveland said.
- Network with knowledgeable sources and attend regional/national conferences.
- Maintain a dynamic social media presence and encourage others to like and share important information. Also stress the importance of opting in for AMBER Alert notifications. “If it were your child, wouldn’t you want everyone to see the AMBER Alert?” Willie-Nez said.
- Be ready for the media to call after an AMBER Alert is issued. They will want a good quality, emailable photo of the child and a flyer, if available.
- Check out the [FEMA fact sheet](#), “How Tribal Governments Can Sign Up for Public Alerts and Warnings.”

# FACES OF THE AMBER ALERT

## PENNSYLVANIA AMBER ALERT COORDINATOR FOCUSES ON TRAINING TO BRING ABDUCTED CHILDREN HOME SAFELY

Corporal Shawn Kofluk is the Pennsylvania Missing Person Clearinghouse Manager and AMBER Alert Coordinator. He is the supervisor of the Criminal Investigation Assessment Unit (CIA) at the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) and supervises seven AMBER Alert designees.

Kofluk has done undercover work and has been with the PSP for more than 25 years. He's been involved in numerous homicide and large-scale criminal investigations—including cases involving the Nalani Johnson abduction and murder, child sex abuser Jerry Sandusky, serial murderers, outlaw motorcycle gangs, and a prison guard who was convicted as a serial rapist.

Kofluk has received numerous awards and commendations, including Trooper of the Year. He was recently interviewed for an episode of the TV show "Bloodline Detectives."

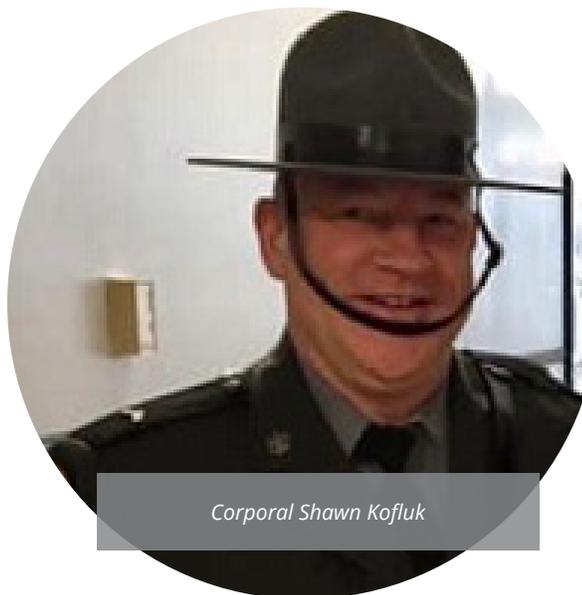
He has a bachelor's degree in psychology and worked in the mental health field for several years prior to going into law enforcement. He is married with four children.

**WHAT IS UNIQUE TO YOUR AMBER ALERT AND MISSING PERSONS PROGRAMS, AND WHAT DO YOU THINK MAKES THEM SUCCESSFUL?**

Currently we have eight AMBER designees who can issue both AMBER Alerts and Missing Endangered Person Alerts (MEPA). We implemented a policy requiring monthly trainings and mock alerts to keep everyone prepared.

**WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO FIND MISSING AND ABDUCTED CHILDREN?**

Probably the thought of my own children being abducted or missing. Having seen these types of investigations and knowing what abductors are capable of gives me with perspective. This is a parent's worst nightmare and I never want to see any family go through something like this.



*Corporal Shawn Kofluk*

**TELL US ABOUT YOUR MOST MEMORABLE SUCCESS STORY IN WORKING A MISSING CHILD CASE. HOW DID THE AMBER ALERT SUPPORT THE OUTCOME? WHAT**

**WERE THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSONS LEARNED?**

The very first AMBER Alert I issued involved multiple children. I was experiencing technical issues with our software and kept running out of time for the recording because we had so much descriptive information for the children and abductor. As soon as I got the recording right, some background noise ruined it.

Regardless, I stayed calm and I was able to work through all the problems. We issued the AMBER Alert and recovered the children safely. I learned that as long as I stay calm and rely on all resources, we can work through any issues that may arise.

### **HOW HAVE YOUR CAREER AND LIFE EXPERIENCES, INCLUDING YOUR WORK AS AN AMBER ALERT COORDINATOR, STRENGTHENED YOUR COMMITMENT TO HELPING ENDANGERED, MISSING, AND ABDUCTED CHILDREN?**

I have a unique perspective because I'm a parent and I have investigated many horrible crimes over the years. Once you become involved with the AMBER Alert program, it sort of takes on a life of its own, and you find yourself becoming very protective over your state's program. It helps me understand the importance of protecting the integrity of our program.

### **WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE HAPPEN WITH YOUR AMBER ALERT PROGRAM AND OTHER PROGRAMS IN THE FUTURE?**

I would like to see our AMBER Alert program continue to grow and find new ways to get AMBER and MEPA alerts out quicker. I would also like to see our CIA Unit continue to provide training to state and municipal law enforcement entities to prepare them to respond to an abducted child emergency.

We are working on a new initiative involving an annual web-based training that will be mandatory. This training would provide our people with knowledge on how to activate an AMBER Alert, the activation criteria, and the importance of speed when issuing and responding to these types of emergencies.

### **HOW HAS TRAINING HELPED YOU IN AMBER ALERT CASES?**

Training is crucial. In my opinion, you can never have enough. Whether you are training first responders on how to handle a child abduction emergency or training AMBER Alert designees on how to actually put out an alert, it all has one goal in mind, the quick response and activation of the alert to save the life of a child.

Our unit teaches as much as we can, and we are always looking to find new audiences and formats to push out training. We are constantly educating and updating police officers, prosecutors, judges, lawmakers, members of the media, and the public about our AMBER Alert program.

### **WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OTHER AMBER ALERT PARTNERS?**

Implement policies requiring training within your department on how to respond to child abduction emergencies, time factors involved, and issuance procedures for an AMBER Alert. Our policy requires officers to take the training, so they better understand the program.

Institute a training protocol for AMBER Alert designees that includes holding drills and other exercises to prepare for issuing an alert. The policy is needed so folks don't become lazy.

Push for checklists within your department, specifically for first responding officers. The checklists ensure officers have all the appropriate information needed for issuing an AMBER Alert which helps to prevent any delays.

Always be on the lookout for new technology to achieve quicker AMBER Alert issuance. And support your designees to the fullest; this can be an extremely stressful job. ☺

# AMBER ALERT TRAINING

## DURING COVID-19

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AATTAP CART Program Coordinator  
Derek VanLuchene

In 1987, when VanLuchene was 17 years old, his eight-year-old brother Ryan was abducted and murdered by a repeat sex offender. VanLuchene went on to become a supervising agent for the Montana Department of Justice, and he continues to work tirelessly as an advocate for missing and abducted children and their families.

VanLuchene coordinates the Child Abduction Response Team (CART) classroom and VILT trainings, as well as the Child Abduction Tabletop Exercise (CATE) courses.

“We expect everyone to interact in these virtual courses, just as they would in the classroom,” said VanLuchene. “In one of our tabletop scenario exercises, we present a case where a girl goes missing from a park. Her parents report her missing and initial officers respond. What do you do next in your investigation? What are the steps you need to take in that investigation?”

Because of their strong use of breakout room discussions, the CATE VILT course is held to a slightly smaller class roster, with around 50 participants per event. The breakout groups optimize multi-agency and/or discipline discussions and groupwork. Instructors visit each room to answer questions and facilitate communication

between people who may be meeting one another for the first time through the virtual training.

### Overcoming Reservations

VanLuchene said some participants have told him they were skeptical an online tabletop exercise like this was sufficient to support the preparation and readiness needed for a complex law enforcement and child protection response. However, students are reporting their early reservations about the effectiveness of virtual courses were unwarranted.

Here are some examples of the feedback from participants:

- “Highly effective delivery through the online platform; really exceptionally done. Far better than any other experiences I’ve had.”
- “Very professional online training. I enjoyed the breakout sessions where we were able to collaborate and discuss resolutions to the incident.”
- “This was the best virtual training I have been to so far; it was engaging and informative. I enjoyed it.”
- “The instructors provided great information. I really enjoyed the diversity of individuals attending and professional background during the breakout sessions and having [the family perspective presenter] tell her personal story was very powerful.”
- “The web-based format is a great time saver.”

AATTAP eLearning, Publications and Digital Collaborations Coordinator Bonnie Ferenbach expects the VILT courses will continue beyond pandemic-related travel

and in-person event restrictions, noting the importance of continuing work to develop additional VILT offerings toward an expanded array of training options. Even as travel and classroom training resumes, she emphasized AATTAP's commitment to delivering training both in-person and web-based formats.

"Increasingly, adult learners working in demanding realities need and expect options in how they receive training, including both self-paced 'anytime-on-demand' courses, as well as live webinars and interactive virtual instructor-led offerings."

As the AATTAP team continues work on expanding the VILT course catalog alongside its self-paced eLearning courses, Ferenbach emphasized "When developing the curriculum for virtual classes, we are careful not to assume that what works in the classroom will make a one-to-one transfer to online instruction."

Noting the incredible efforts and ongoing hard work of the AATTAP team, she added, "We have an amazing team, with each member embracing an 'all hands on deck' mindset, to develop, test, deliver and continuously improve, with an eye toward meeting what is sure to be a continued and increasing demand."

This trajectory is based on clear evidence that was evolving pre-pandemic, and which has only been increased through stay-at-home restrictions and financial hardships across the nation; online learning is turning out to be the only way most organizations can obtain essential training and continuing education. And even as

pandemic restrictions subside, many agencies and jurisdictions simply do not have the personnel bandwidth, time, or budgets for time off and travel to participate in classroom training.

As of January 2021, AATTAP had 10 additional VILT events scheduled to date, with more than 800 registration requests received. Additional courses on other topics are being added monthly.

"As these new classes are approved for delivery, we have seen rosters fill quickly, with waiting lists and requests for more training topics," said AATTAP Program Director Jim Walters. "Our team will keep developing and refining these new learning options while preparing for the time we can get back into the classroom."

Registration and additional information about [AATTAP learning opportunities can be found here.](#)



AATTAP eLearning, Publications and Digital Collaborations Coordinator Bonnie Ferenbach

# AMBER ALERT BRIEFS



## HACKER CLAIMS ACCESS TO U.S. AND CANADA EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEMS

A U.S. hacker asserts he can break into the U.S. and Canadian Emergency Alert Systems and claims he could send a nationwide message through both systems. He said he was able to discover passwords from key manufacturers to access their systems. “Theoretically I can send anything from a volcano warning to the entire U.S. to an AMBER alert. If I really wanted, I could send out custom messages too,” he said. The hacker also warns of others with the same technological know-how.

In November 2020, hackers gained access to Florida’s emergency communications channel and sent an unauthorized message to the state’s emergency response team. “The fact that someone would use an emergency alert system for their own purpose, whatever it is, is both irresponsible and unlawful,” said Jason Mahon, communications director for the Florida Division of Emergency Management. The Florida Department of Law Enforcement has been asked to investigate. ☺



## VICTIM’S FAMILY SEEKS A “QUAWAN ALERT” FOR MISSING CHILDREN IN LOUISIANA

The family of a murdered 15-year-old boy wants Louisiana to create a “Quawan Alert,” to notify the public as soon as a child goes missing. Quawan “Bobby” Charles was found dead near a field three-and-a-half years ago after video showed him getting into a vehicle as a passenger. The victim’s family is upset that police did not issue an AMBER Alert and want a system in place to help missing children, particularly children from poor communities. ☺



## LAS VEGAS BETS AMBER ALERTS WILL BE MORE EFFECTIVE BY BECOMING A “SMART CITY”

Las Vegas has installed 123 miles of fiber-optic cable to support the infrastructure needs to become a “smart city.” The system includes high-definition video cameras, sound and motion sensors, and other online technology. Authorities say the video cameras can scan for a license plate connected to an AMBER Alert and help recover missing and abducted children. ☺



## NCMEC BEGINS USING NEW NOTIFICATION SOFTWARE FOR AMBER ALERTS

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children is now using a new software provider to send out Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) for the AMBER Alert system. NCMEC selected OnSolve, a critical event management provider, to provide time-sensitive notifications to geographic areas close to an incident. ☺

## CONGRESS CONSIDERS BILL AIMING TO EXPAND EMERGENCY ALERTS

Federal legislators are being asked to pass the Reliable Emergency Alert Distribution Improvement (READ) Act so more people will receive emergency alerts. The bill will authorize research into new ways to alert people, track and study false alerts, and improve the way states plan for emergency alerts. The legislation expands AMBER Alerts to all U.S. territories and removes the ability for people to opt-out of certain federal emergency alerts. 🍷



## TENNESSEE LEGISLATORS CONSIDER “EVELYN’S LAW” TO HELP MISSING CHILDREN

Tennessee lawmakers are considering a bill that will require parents to immediately notify law enforcement within 48 hours if a child goes missing. “Evelyn’s Law” would also make everyone a “mandatory reporter” if they believe a child is in danger. The bill is named after Evelyn Boswell, a toddler who was missing for nearly two months before she was reported missing. Violators could face jail time for not making timely reports. 🍷



## FLORIDA NOW HAS “CLICKABLE” AMBER ALERTS

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement can now issue AMBER Alerts with clickable links to photos and information about an abducted child. The links are included in the Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) that go to cellphones. Without the links, the WEA is restricted to only 90 characters, which provides only a limited amount of information to the public. 🍷



## PENNSYLVANIA LAWMAKER SEEKS “JAY ALERT” SYSTEM FOR HIT-AND-RUNS

A Pennsylvania state legislator wants to crack down on hit-and-runs by creating a “Jay Alert” which would notify body shops after an incident occurs. Pennsylvania State Senator Anthony Williams said the law was inspired by an eight-year-old girl who was struck and killed by a hit-and-run driver while walking home from school. The suspect was caught after a body shop owner notified police. The law would expand the AMBER Alert system and send descriptions of vehicles in hit-and-runs to all state body shops. 🍷



# AMBER ALERT INTERNATIONAL

**TEST ON NOVEMBER 25.**

VISIT [ALERTREADY.CA](https://alertready.ca)



## **CANADA CONTINUES TO TEST ITS EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEM**

The Canadian Emergency Alert System was tested again on November 25, 2020, to make sure the emergency alerts are effectively reaching cellphones, radio, and TV stations. Past tests have revealed technical issues that led to notification delays. Authorities are still working to make sure the system is compatible with different networks and cell towers. The Alert Ready system has been used more than 170 times since it was launched on January 1, 2020, and its notifications can be sent by emergency management officials, warning of severe weather or when there is an imminent threat to life. The alerts have been valuable in warning the public and have also prompted the public to provide tips.

The Ontario Provincial Police have also begun using Alert Ready to keep residents safe and notify the public about AMBER Alerts. The system has been used four times in Ontario since July 2020. 🍁

## **EUROPEAN MISSING PERSONS ORGANIZATION MEMBERSHIP GROWS, UNDERTAKES WORK ON LONG-TERM MISSING CASES**

The Police Expert Network on Missing Persons (PEN-MP) in Europe has grown to include more than 80 members in 30 countries. The network is part of AMBER Alert Europe and recently added eight new law enforcement members from Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Kosovo, North-Macedonia, and Serbia. The PEN-MP is the official European missing persons police network, consisting of police experts in the field of missing persons.

The PEN-MP is also connecting organizations in different countries on a project to analyze cold- and long-term missing persons cases. The network will work with different police academies and universities all over the world. Four disciplinary teams are now analyzing an attempted child homicide and long-term missing person's case in Germany. More cases are expected to be analyzed in 2021. 🍁





## DIGITAL CONFERENCE TRAINS EUROPEAN OFFICERS ON MISSING PERSONS CASES

Slovenia hosted a digital conference on missing persons cases for PEN-MP officers on November 3, 2020. Law enforcement officers shared a missing person case in Poland and offered insight on the correlation between online grooming and missing children.

Organizers hope the event will help different European countries to better connect when a missing person case crosses national boundaries. "We all know that law enforcement cooperation is of the utmost importance when it comes to missing person cases, not only nationally but also across borders," said Mr. Jože Senica, Deputy Director General of the Slovenian National Police. 🍷

## AMBER ALERT EUROPE TEAMS UP WITH ORGANIZATION THAT ADVOCATES FOR CHILD SEX ABUSE VICTIMS

AMBER Alert Europe is now partnering with the WePROTECT Global Alliance, an international organization working to stop child sexual abuse and exploitation. The partnership follows up AMBER Alert Europe's 2020 #DontBeAnEasyCatch campaign, which warned children about online grooming. "Awareness of online child sexual abuse and exploitation is still lacking. With this partnership, we can strengthen the efforts to better protect children in Europe," said Frank Hoen, Chairman and Founder, AMBER Alert Europe. 🍷



# AMBER ALERT ON THE FRONT LINES:

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The DPS had also been working during the past year to address concerns they were having regarding use of the Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA). DPS stopped using the WEA system until technical issues could be resolved to ensure the public receives the best and most accurate information.

“For a long time, we’ve been talking about how to get a message to as many people as humanly possible,” said Joe Dougherty, DPS Director of Public Affairs. “This is one tool that allows us to hit a person in every pocket and every purse where they’ve got their cell phone.”

The WEA messages now contain a link to access the latest information about a child abduction. The Utah AMBER Alert coordinators also created a blackout period between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m. when alerts would not automatically go to cellphones. Depending on the circumstances, law enforcement agencies can still request a WEA during this time frame.

“Each AMBER Alert definitely teaches us something to help us the next time an alert is issued,” said Vaisima. “With this AMBER Alert being as successful as it was, we learned the changes we are making and have made are leading us in the right direction. We will be able to use this success

and information gathered from this alert in future training, which will ultimately help us with any future alerts.”

The DPS is also updating its AMBER Alert program policies and procedures. The coordinators will continue training officers and have several training events scheduled this year.

“It is really important to understand the way different systems work, the needs of the public, and how new technology may improve the AMBER Alert program,” added Vaisima. “Doing these things helped with the success of this alert.”

In the end, the victim’s mother is grateful so many were working together to bring her daughter home safely. “I really appreciate you guys being there and being a good place for her to be,” Spratley said to a reporter. “That’s really awesome, that there’s good people out there still.”