



## The Future of AMBER Alerts

National Conference Will Determine How Future Child Abductions Are Handled

It's been said that without a vision, the people perish. Although the AMBER Alert program is in no danger of perishing, the 2007 National AMBER Alert Conference in Denver will be critical to creating a vision for keeping the AMBER Alert network strong and focused on the safety of our children.

"The annual conference is a crucial means of reinforcing and maintaining ongoing communication about the AMBER Alert program," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Cybele K. Daley. "The ultimate mission is to develop innovative strategies to safely return children to their families."

The vision for AMBER Alert actually started to take focus last year at a strategic planning session that was

also held in Denver. More than 40 AMBER Alert partners met in October 2006 to discuss how AMBER Alerts will work in 18 months, 3 years and 5 years from now. Participants discussed what is needed to make improvements and who will get it done.

"We are a family and we have come together to take care of our children," said Ron Laney, Associate Administrator for the Office of Justice Programs' Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Child Protection Division, at the planning session. "Please don't forget the children who don't meet the AMBER Alert criteria. They are in danger and at risk."

The original AMBER Alert Plan began with one child and one person with

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## Departure of National AMBER Alert Coordinator

After making some dramatic improvements in the AMBER Alert Program, National AMBER Alert Coordinator Regina B. Schofield is moving on to a new position. The Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) resigned September 28 to become the Managing Director of Casey Family Programs Reform 2020.

In her farewell letter to AMBER Alert partners, the outgoing coordinator thanked everyone for what has been accomplished. "I am proud to have been part of the growth and development of the AMBER Alert network. With your help, we've seen AMBER grow from an effective emergency response system into a powerful deterrent."

Some notable accomplishments under Regina B. Schofield's direction:

- Outreach to Indian Tribes and Canada and Mexico
- The Wireless AMBER Alerts Initiative and secondary distribution agreements
- Child Abduction Response Teams
- Partnerships with trucking carriers and airport security screeners
- Identifying AMBER Alert's role in stopping sex offenders from preying on children

We extend our best wishes to Regina in her new endeavors and thank her for her vision and efforts to bring missing children home. ☺



Regina B. Schofield, outgoing National AMBER Alert Coordinator

# On The Front Lines

Four Children Recovered After AMBER Alert Issued For Alleged Killer

## THE BEGINNING OF AMBER

In 1996, nine-year-old Amber Hagerman was kidnapped and brutally murdered in Arlington, Texas. The blueprint for the AMBER Alert Plan was first articulated on a radio talk show and then in a letter written by Diana Simone to KDMX-FM in Addison, Texas. It reads in part:



"In Amber's case, for example, I'm sure a number of people saw her in that black pickup truck but simply did not know what they were seeing. To remedy this, I would like to suggest an emergency system be set up so that when a verified 911 call is placed, all the radio stations in the area would be notified immediately and they would interrupt programming to broadcast an emergency alert. In this way, thousands of people would be alerted within minutes of an occurrence, greatly minimizing the chance of successful escape. If you are able to gather support for this Emergency Broadcast Plan, my one request is that it be known as Amber's Plan."



Lt. LD Maples, California Highway Patrol

knows the abducted child has been recovered safely.

"An AMBER Alert takes off time from my life expectancy," said Maples of the California Highway Patrol. "I'm wondering, what else can we do?"

The AMBER Alert that went out on August 20, 2007 in San Bernardino, California was no exception. Joseph Sanchez had been separated from his wife Charity for less than a month when he stopped at her home and asked to come in. Sanchez immediately became angry when he saw that his estranged wife was with a male friend.

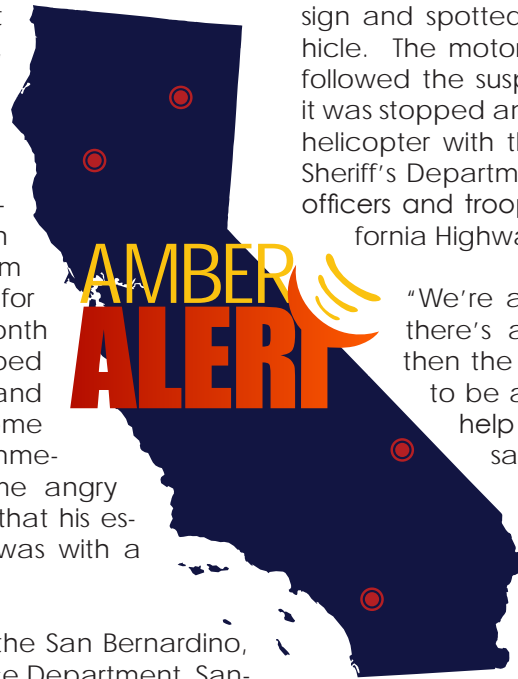
According to the San Bernardino, California Police Department, Sanchez pulled a knife from the drawer and stabbed Joe Madrigal to death. He also chased his wife down the street and threw the knife at her but missed. Sanchez then went to his parents house and took his four children, ages seven months, three, four and six-years-old, and drove away in a dark blue van. The suspect's parents also went with them in the van.

Maples said he is inundated with requests for alerts and the facts in

this case required him to balance between the integrity of the AMBER Alert Plan and the safety of the children. "It's always difficult to tell the mental state of the suspect," said Maples. "We knew he was violent but we didn't know if he was a threat to his kids."

"We decided to issue a regional AMBER Alert instead of a statewide alert because we had no indication he was leaving the area," said Maples. "This gave us the ability to really focus on one area." He said the situation would have been more intense if police had information the suspect was heading toward the border.

Only 56 minutes after the alert went out a motorist saw the AMBER Alert on a variable message highway sign and spotted the suspect's vehicle. The motorist called 911 and followed the suspect's vehicle until it was stopped and surrounded by a helicopter with the San Bernardino Sheriff's Department, Upland police officers and troopers from the California Highway Patrol.



"We're a mobile society. If there's a vehicle involved then the signs have proven to be an effective tool to help us find children," said Maples. "This is a good example of why transportation is such an important partner."

Sanchez was arrested on suspicion of murder and his parents were arrested for being accessories to murder. All four children were unharmed and returned to their mother.

"I do a 'happy dance' whenever there's a successful conclusion," said Maples. The stress and the jitters disappear for the coordinator until the next AMBER Alert is issued.

### Future, continued from page 1

a good idea. (See "Beginning of AMBER" on page 2) However, it took visionaries from law enforcement, broadcasting and other disciplines to take that idea and turn it into the expansive child abduction recovery plan that exists today. More than 10 years after AMBER Alerts started, this question is still being asked: How can we make it better?

"History is the best predictor of the future. We can learn from our mistakes," said Robert Hoever, Associate Director of Training and Outreach for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

Here are some of the areas being explored to improve AMBER Alerts:

- Create a seamless AMBER Alert network
- Provide comprehensive training and resources
- Educate the public
- Share new technology
- Create standardized criteria

## AMBER ALERT PART OF NATIVE AMERICAN LAW ENFORCEMENT CONFERENCE

Efforts to help abducted children were highlighted at the annual conference for the National Native American Law Enforcement Association. The three-day conference was held in Memphis in October and featured presentations on the AMBER Alert program, the scope and scale of missing and abducted children incidents and

"There are lots of issues out there," said Washington State Patrol Missing Persons Clearinghouse Coordinator Sue Miller. "The strategic planning session helped us focus on what needs immediate attention with AMBER Alerts."

A more detailed look at the strategic planning session is included in a publication called "AMBER Alert Program and Initiatives: 2007 - 2008 Strategic Plan." The Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs will provide this publication, as well as reports on an emancipated missing children project and a victims' (survivors') roundtable, at the conference.

"We want to make sure all of our AMBER partners have the very best information possible to help them recover children," said Daley.

The beginning of AMBER Alerts started with one child. The future of AMBER Alerts will require a vision to make sure every child is safe. ☺

the Adam Walsh Act. "The AMBER Alert is in all 50 states but it's not in all Native American reservations," said Ron Gurley, FirstPic, Inc. Project Manager for Native American Programs. "We are working hard to get the alerts in Indian Country so we can respond quickly when a child is endangered." ☺

## AMBER ALERT CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

The National AMBER Alert Conference being held November 13-16 in Denver will break new ground by providing individualized training for all of the partners involved with AMBER Alerts. The conference will include courses specific to:

- AMBER Alert Coordinators
- Missing Person Clearinghouse Directors/Managers
- Broadcasters & Media
- Transportation
- Law Enforcement
- Native Americans
- Canada and Mexico as they relate to border issues
- Families

The conference will also feature presentations that will be valuable to all participants, including: case studies on a child abduction; updates on the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act; the history of AMBER Alerts; efforts on Endangered Missing plans; lessons from families of missing and abducted children; and Child Abduction Response Teams.

### AMBER Alert Training

The 2008 AMBER Alert training calendar is now available. Visit [www.amber-net.org](http://www.amber-net.org) to register.

## MINNESOTA HOSTS NATIVE AMERICAN CONFERENCE

The 3rd Annual Native American Law Enforcement Summit (NALES) was held this September in Hinckley, Minnesota. The three-day conference brought together representatives from law enforcement, social services, courts and corrections to discuss ways to prevent crime and create safer communities. ☺

*see more about AMBER Alert in Indian Country on page 6*

## AMBER Fact:

AMBER Alerts can now be delivered immediately to MySpace, airports, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents. This only happens if the AMBER Alert coordinator has signed up to get automatic Secondary Distribution with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. You can sign up by contacting [rhoever@ncmec.org](mailto:rhoever@ncmec.org). More information on the AMBER Alert Secondary Distribution Program can be found at [www.amberalert.gov](http://www.amberalert.gov)

## CHILD PORNOGRAPHY LINKED TO MOLESTING

A recent New York Times article detailed a new government study of convicted sex offenders that indicates that most men who download child pornography also molest children. The study by psychologists at the Federal Bureau of Prisons found that 85 percent of the offenders said they had sexually abused minors, ranging from inappropriate touching to rape. Some debate exists whether a study of volunteer prisoners can be applied to other adults who have downloaded child pornography.

# Profile: Beth Alberts

Beth Alberts found her calling in life after twenty years of working at non-profit groups. She was hired to take over the Texas Center for the Missing in 2001. A few months later she was asked to be the coordinator for the Houston Regional AMBER Alert plan, the nation's largest regional plan.

"It sounded interesting but I knew nothing about missing kids," said Alberts. Soon her life became consumed with missing kids. She started training officers about AMBER Alert and set up a coalition of search and rescue groups to look for abducted children.

"This is not a job. This is a mission," said Alberts. "I never felt about an issue or cause the way I feel now."

She keeps track of all the changes she has seen since she started. Some examples:

- Most kids used to be taken in "snatch and grabs." Now they are lured through the Internet.
- Houston didn't use to issue AMBER Alerts for children taken by non-custodial parents. The criteria was changed after a father killed his wife and ran away with the kids to Mexico.
- Initially few law enforcement officers knew about AMBER Alerts. Now it is unusual to find anyone who hasn't heard about the alerts.
- Highway signs proved to be effective at notifying motorists about alerts. The signs are even more effective at raising public awareness.

"One of the things I'm proud of is how the AMBER Alert has been able to adapt," she said. "We take new technology and figure out a way to use it."

Her advice for new AMBER Alert Coordinators: "Don't reinvent the wheel. Talk to people who have been around and find out what's important and what you don't have to worry about. But you still have to care like it's your own kid."

Alberts still can't forget one AMBER Alert that didn't end well. On March 10, 2001, 13-year-old Laura Ayala went to the convenience store next to her home to get a newspaper for a school project. "That was the last time she was seen," said Alberts. Police found the girl's sandal and the newspaper in the street. "She was snatched four feet from the gate to her home. It still haunts me that she was so close."

The tragedies only push Alberts to do more. She is busy starting a local Child Abduction Response Team, creating closer ties with Mexico and making full use of Houston's new Mobile Search and Education Center. (See story on page 5)

"I still find it fascinating after seven years," said Alberts. "I still think there is so much to learn. I'm absolutely enthralled. If I did nothing else I did save children's lives. If you can save a child that is something." ☺



Houston Regional AMBER Alert Coordinator, Beth Alberts



Mobile Search and Education Center, Houston, TX.

## HOUSTON'S AMBER ALERT PROGRAM IS ON A ROLL

In Houston, AMBER Alert training can now come right to your door. Houston's new Mobile Search and Education Center is a recreational vehicle equipped with 14 computer stations, satellite Internet and a 40" plasma TV. "I can pull it right into the parking lot of the law enforcement agency," said Beth Alberts, Houston Regional AMBER Alert Coordinator. The mobile lab can be used to



Inside the Mobile Search and Education Center, Houston's newest tool against child abductors.



The mobile crime fighter has 14 Computer stations, satellite internet and a 40" plasma TV.

practice initiating an AMBER Alert or be deployed as a command center for actual child abductions and search and rescue operations. The Texas Center for the Missing was able to purchase the lab after being awarded a \$100,000 grant from Humana Insurance. "When they announced we had won at the grant awards event, I felt like I had earned an Academy Award," said Alberts. ☺

## SOUND LEGAL ADVICE

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is offering a new tool to help investigate and prosecute crimes against children. The "National Online Crimes Against Children Legal Resource" is a free training course for child advocates. Nationally recognized expert Dan Armagh offers the latest in case law and the intricacies involving searches and seizures of electronic evidence. For more information contact Lisa Schmid at [schmidl@fvtc.edu](mailto:schmidl@fvtc.edu).

## ARIZONA AMBER COORDINATOR ADDRESSES TRIBAL OFFICERS

Arizona AMBER Alert Coordinator Art Brooks asked Tribal law enforcement officers to become more involved with the AMBER Alert program at the Arizona Criminal Justice Conference. The meeting with the Indian Country Intelligence Network (ICIN) was held July 11 in Flagstaff. Brooks stressed that smaller agencies should partner with larger, neighboring agencies to make sure AMBER Alert activations go smoothly.

## TRIBES TAKE PART IN WASHINGTON SAFETY SUMMIT

Tribal, local, state and federal law enforcement officers shared prevention, intervention and enforcement strategies in September at the Washington Community Safety Summit. The goal of the three-day conference in Shelton, Washington was to create safe and secure communities.

## TRIBAL LEADERS CONSULT WITH FORMER NATIONAL

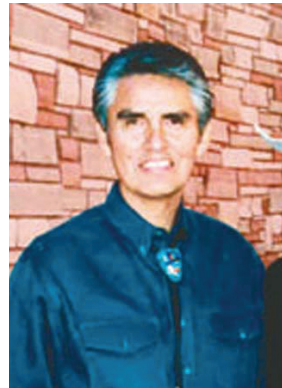
### AMBER ALERT COORDINATOR

AMBER Alert was on the agenda during a meeting held this July in Phoenix between Tribal leaders and former National AMBER Alert Coordinator Regina B. Schofield. The fourth "Tribal Consultation, Training and Technical Assistance Session" included experts from five federal departments and featured a discussion on how to meet the needs of Native American communities. Schofield also formed an advisory group to help implement the Adam Walsh Act in Indian Country.

# Navajo Nation Gets CART Training

The Navajo Nation became the first Tribe to host a Child Abduction Response Team (CART) training. Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley was instrumental in bringing the two and one-half day course to Farmington, New Mexico in August.

"I think CART is enhancing our knowledge. It's making us realize that child abductions can happen anywhere and it's important to be prepared," said Navajo Nation Director of Public Safety Samson Cowboy.



Navajo Nation President,  
Joe Shirley

Approximately 45 representatives from numerous disciplines took part in the specialized training including law enforcement officers, criminal investigators and members of the Public Service Oversight Committee, Health Department, Probation, Corrections and the Boys and Girls Club.

"When a child is abducted, time is of the essence," said Cybele K. Daley, Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Justice Programs. "This training will bring a much-needed tool to help Tribal law enforcement recover missing and abducted children."

"It's going to be the first CART in Indian Country. It's a huge step," said Phil Keith, AMBER Alert Program

Director for Fox Valley Technical College. Joining the technical assistance team were representatives from FirstPic, Inc., a partner and liaison that has been working with Federal agencies and Tribes to bring AMBER Alert to Indian Country. "The resource staff at FirstPic, Inc. adds great value to the initiative," said Keith.

"I thought it was an outstanding training. It showed the Tribe is very interested in having an AMBER Alert program. It also shows they want to be able to respond quickly to any abduction of Navajo children," said Joe Cordova, FirstPic, Inc. Program Director, who helped organize the training.

The Navajo Nation extends into the states of Utah, Arizona and New Mexico, and covers more than 27,000 square miles.

Public Safety Director Samson is already interested in expanding the CART to make sure everyone is ready. "It can only grow," he said.

## TRIBES SELECTED FOR AMBER ALERT PILOT

The Department of Justice has invited 13 tribes in ten areas to serve as pilot communities for the AMBER Alert in Indian Country Initiative. "The ten Tribal sites will serve as demonstration sites for other Native American communities," said Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Justice Programs Cybele K. Daley. "The pilot sites will help expand the AMBER Alert program into Indian Country and bridge the gap between Tribal communities

and state and regional programs across the country."

The selected areas are: Acoma, Hopi, Laguna and Zuni Pueblo communities; Choctaw Nation; Crow Nation; Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians; Gila River Indian Community; Navajo Nation; Northern Arapaho Tribe; Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Community; Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska; and Yakama Nation.

# CANADIAN CORNER

## NEWFOUNDLAND COORDINATOR EAGER FOR AMBER ALERT CONFERENCE

While sitting at the 2006 National AMBER Alert Conference, AMBER Alert Coordinator Sean Ennis thought the prospect of issuing an alert in Newfoundland was quite small. Newfoundland has a small population compared to other geographic areas, living on a large island as far east as anyone can go in North America.

"You tend to think it can't happen in your backyard," said Sgt. Ennis, Royal Newfoundland Constabulary. "But I soon realized we are truly a global community and borders don't exist for criminals."

Three weeks after the 2006 conference, Alberta issued an AMBER Alert for a suspect who had recently lived in Newfoundland. Ennis was notified that the suspect may be heading his way with two victims. However, the suspect and victims were found before an alert was issued in Newfoundland.

Later that year Ennis was about to issue an alert for the child of a woman who had just been murdered in St. John's, Newfoundland. Patrol officers found the child safe with family members before the alert could go out.

"The AMBER Alert plan has the potential to fail if you're not ready," said Ennis. "I'm like most people and have two fire extinguishers, not that I expect my house to catch fire, but I'm prepared just in case."

Ennis said he learned a lot from his fellow coordinators at the last AMBER Alert conference and he is looking forward to learning more at the Denver conference. "Many AMBER coordinators have never been called on to make the final decision of issuing an AMBER Alert

and starting in motion all that such a decision entails."

"The conference provides us an opportunity to learn from those coordinators who have had experience issuing AMBER Alerts. I do not wish to reinvent the wheel and I would be a fool not to learn about the obstacles from those who have traveled the road before. The experience seated at each and every table is a resource that is rivaled by any book."

The Royal Newfoundland Constabulary and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police launched Newfoundland's AMBER Alert plan four years ago. All of the Eastern Canadian AMBER Alert coordinators met last January in Moncton, New Brunswick to discuss their goals and try to unify their plans. "In Canada, we are trying to work out a singular interpretation of the AMBER criteria to ensure interprovincial uniformity," said Ennis.

Ennis has found that what works in big cities doesn't always work in rural areas. "You don't need highway signs or Blackberries to get the word out here." Ennis decided to build his province's plan by using the "community spirit" enjoyed between police, media and other partners. He also started focusing on the planes and boats that arrive and depart from the island every day.

"It is essential to have a plan in place so that if an AMBER Alert is needed, it will roll out in a timely and effective manner," said Ennis. "Our response in the face of a child abduction can only be successful, if during the time when no threat is present, we plan for such an incident." ◀



Sgt. Sean Ennis  
Royal Newfoundland Constabulary

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### AMBER Fact:

Statistics used for "AMBER Alert Success Stories" only include cases where the alert was responsible for the safe recovery of an abducted child. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children does not count children who are found safely using other means after an AMBER Alert has been activated. NCMEC does not report any case involving a deceased child as a "success story."

# Odds and Ends

## NEVADA ADOPTS AMBER HOAX LAW

Nevada Governor Jim Gibbons signed the "AMBER Hoax" law that will increase the penalty for anyone knowingly filing a false police report that results in an AMBER Alert activation. Violators will be charged with a Class C felony and law enforcement officials believe it will be a powerful tool to protect the integrity of the AMBER Alert plan. AMBER Alert Coordinator Bob Fisher worked with legislators, law enforcement officers and broadcasters to get the bill passed. ☺



Nevada Governor  
Jim Gibbons

## "PEOPLE" PROFILES CHILD ABDUCTION FAMILIES

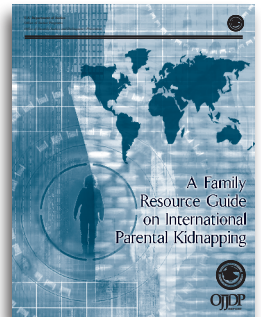
The heartbreak when a child is taken and the joy when a child is found were captured in the August 20, 2007, issue of People magazine. The five-page article profiled the Surviving Parents Coalition, a group of parents who have experienced a child abduction. The group is now working for strong anti-child-predator legislation. "We all share membership in this sad club that no one wants to belong to," Erin Runnion told People. "There is strength in numbers and this cause deserves an army." More information is available at [www.survivingparentscoalition.org](http://www.survivingparentscoalition.org). ☺



People Magazine  
August 20, 2007

## NEW GUIDE OFFERS ADVICE ON INTERNATIONAL PARENTAL KIDNAPPINGS

A new version of "A Family Resource Guide on International Kidnapping" offers practical advice on what to do when an abducted child is taken out of the country. The second edition includes civil and criminal remedies, applicable laws, public and private resources and identifies strategies to help parents recover or contact their children in another country. The guide is available online at <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/publications/PubAbstract.asp?pubi=237060>. ☺

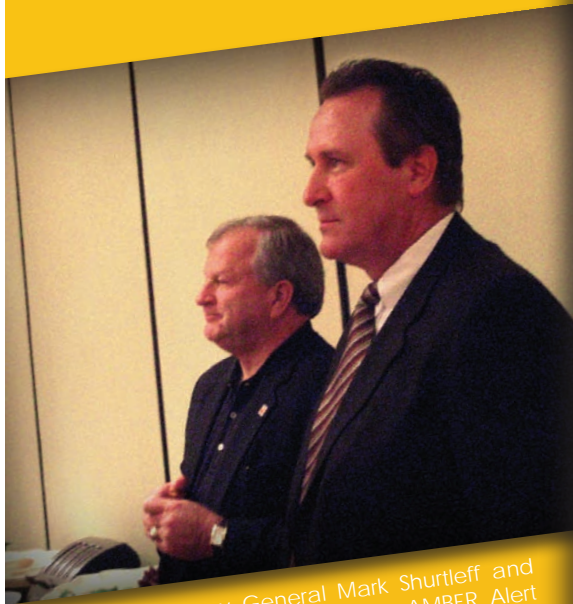


A Family Resource Guide  
on Internet Kidnapping

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Utah Attorney General Mark Shurtleff and Fox Valley Technical College AMBER Alert Program Director Phil Keith. Shurtleff spoke at the CART and ISMAC training sessions held in Salt Lake City last June. The attorney general thanked everyone for their tireless efforts to recover missing and abducted children.

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Your story ideas and pictures are welcome.

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THE AMBER ADVOCATE