

# The **AMBER** *Advocate*

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## AMBER and sex offender registries — what's the connection?

Regina Schofield on sex offender abductions: "...It's up to us to stop them."

You know a conference is going to be controversial when the hotel staff doesn't want to display the posters featuring the title of the conference. Posters for the "National Symposium on Sex Offender Management and Accountability" had the word "Sex" cut out or covered up. Apparently, parents staying at the Disneyworld hotel in Orlando complained that they didn't want to explain what the conference was about to their children.

Ironically, protecting children was actually the reason more than 550 participants from all 50 states gathered for the fall symposium in Orlando. This was the first national conference on this difficult subject to bring together Sex Offender Registry managers, prosecutors, law enforcement officers and probation officers.

At the conference, Assistant Attorney General and National AMBER Alert Coordinator Regina Schofield pointed out that some of the most tragic child kidnapping cases have involved sex offenders. "We want to make sure no one has to wake up wondering if their children have been taken. Ladies and gentlemen, it's up to us to stop them."

She cited a recent NCMEC study that indicates efforts to protect children are paying off. "One child in seven has received a sexual solicitation online. Five years ago that number was one in five. We have to get that number down to zero."

"These crimes have changed the way we live,"

said Jim Burch, Deputy Director of the Bureau of Justice Assistance. "They affect the very fabric of our society."

The conference also had break-out sessions to discuss ways sex offender registries can be incorporated into AMBER Alert plans. "When a child is missing, the first thing we do is look at the sex offender registry," said Ron Laney, Associate Administrator of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. "Almost 70% of all sex offenders are not incarcerated.



"We can't arrest our way out of this problem."

But, state sex offender registries are experiencing the same growing pains found in state AMBER Alert Plans.

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### SEX OFFENDER FACTS:

The new Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act requires sex offender registries to get in person verification of the following:

- Criminal history & offense language
- ID cards
- Arrest warrants
- DNA, fingerprints & palm prints
- Vehicle information

## The Jessica Lunsford case

Details from the investigation into the abduction and murder of nine year-old Jessica Lunsford were shared by Citrus County Florida Sheriff Jeffrey Dawsy at the National Symposium on Sex Offender Management and Accountability. Jessica was killed on February 27, 2005, by John Couey, a registered sex offender with a history of parole violations who was being monitored by GPS. "These cases will change you," said Dawsy. The sheriff worked with the victim's family and others to help pass Jessica's Law to increase tighter restrictions on sex offenders. "We have to hold these people responsible. These people are dangerous."

AMBER and sex offender registries, continued from page 1.

After a year of study, AMBER Alert Program Director Phil Keith found a lack of consistency in plans, a lack of cooperation between federal, state and local agencies and a surprisingly low



Jessica Lunsford

number of NCIC entries after a child has been abducted. "Just imagine if your child was taken and it wasn't entered into NCIC within 48 hours," said Keith. "That's disturbing to me."

The most poignant part

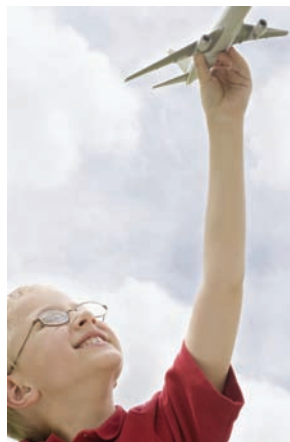
of the conference came when Montana criminal investigator Derek VanLuchene talked about the kidnapping and murder of his little brother. Eight-year-old Ryan VanLuchene was abducted by a repeat sex offender from the family's backyard on August 11, 1987. The perpetrator had just been released from prison for the rape of a 13 year-old boy.

"We go on but we think of Ryan," said VanLuchene. The detective challenged everyone to be ready, in case a child is kidnapped in their community. "Remember why you got in this job in the first place: to make a difference. When you do a case like this, think of Ryan. Think of the difference you can make and do it with passion." ☾

## New ways to keep kids safe

Airport safety innovations, websites build a safer world for children

### No more up, up and away with kids



Airports will no longer be an option for child abductors hoping to take off with a child. The nation's 43,000 airport security screeners are now getting AMBER Alerts and photos of abducted children. The alerts will go to screeners, airport and airline officials. Transportation

Security Administration screeners check 2 million people a day at about 450 airports around the country.

### New website helps parents keep kids safe online

Parents now have a tutor to help them keep up with their children on the Internet and keep them safe at the same time. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children is launching NetSmartz411, a free website offering information and answers so parents will know what tools are available to protect their children from predators and unwanted messages. NCMEC experts are also available to answer individual questions by e-mail.

The website can be found at [www.NetSmartz411.org](http://www.NetSmartz411.org).

### Teen social networking site will send AMBER Alerts to users

One of the most popular websites for teens will now distribute AMBER Alerts. MySpace will instantly send the alerts to all users within the zip codes where the alert was issued. The notification will appear in a small text box at the top of a profile and give users the option to receive additional



information such as the photo and description of the abducted child, suspect and vehicle. The National Center for Missing & Exploited

Children agreed to partner with MySpace to reach out to this very connected online community.

"This partnership expands the AMBER Alert secondary distribution network, allowing even more people to serve as the extra eyes and ears of law enforcement as they work to bring abducted children home," said Regina B. Schofield, Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Justice Programs and the National AMBER Alert Coordinator. ☾

*“A leader is defined as someone who is not afraid to express his opinion even if it goes against the grain of traditional thought. Everyone brings something to the table and it’s important you don’t miss something.”*  
— Bob Fisher

## Personality profile: Bob Fisher, CEO of the Nevada Broadcasters Association

Fearless Nevada official builds memorials, public awareness



**Bob Fisher, President, CEO of the Nevada Broadcasters Association**

Chances are if you work with AMBER Alerts you know Bob Fisher. His colorful sweaters and fearless approach to saying what’s on his mind at AMBER Alert conferences are legendary. Nevada’s AMBER Alert Coordinator

is one of only two broadcasters to serve as a State AMBER Alert Coordinator. Consequently he is never shy about making sure the voice of broadcasters is heard loud and clear.

“I believe passionately in what we are doing,” says Fisher. “A leader is defined as someone who is not afraid to express his opinion even if it goes against the grain of traditional thought. Everyone brings something to the table and it’s important you don’t miss something.”

Fisher says he grew up learning to serve. He’s the president of the Nevada Broadcasters Association and he hosts a weekly public affairs radio and TV program. He also serves on the state Homeland Security Commission.

Add “architect of Nevada’s AMBER Alert Plan” to Fisher’s titles. He spent two-and-a-half years rebuilding the state Emergency Alert System, drafting legislation, writing protocols and forging partnerships before he told an impatient Governor that Nevada’s AMBER Alert plan was finally ready in June 2003. “Broadcasters felt the responsibility to bring AMBER Alerts to their individual states,” says Fisher.

Along the way Fisher made lots of friends with law enforcement. “Broadcasters have always had a love-hate relationship with law enforcement. I think AMBER has gone along way to make it a

stronger relationship.”

His favorite AMBER Alert story is about the Nevada trooper who pulled over the car of a suspected child kidnapper. “The suspect said to the trooper, ‘Why did you stop me?’ The trooper pointed to the AMBER Alert on the highway message sign just down the road and said, ‘That’s you buddy.’”

Nevada has taken a unique approach to spreading the word about AMBER Alerts. It started when Fisher received a visit from Tanja Brown, a woman who was upset that vandals were defacing crosses placed on highways to honor murdered children. “She told me that there needs to be a permanent memorial for missing, abducted and murdered children.”

Together they began working to place a park memorial in every county in Nevada. So far, four of the planned 17 memorials have been built. Fisher dedicates each memorial with a plug for AMBER Alerts. “It ties the AMBER Alert and abducted children in a real way. The AMBER Alert is lighting the way for public awareness about missing, abducted and murdered children.”

Fisher’s newsletters for the Nevada Broadcaster Association are also filled with the latest AMBER Alert news. Those newsletters are sent to broadcasters, community leaders and AMBER Alert partners all over the country. “It’s hard to get people to do what they say they are going to do. There has to be a time when politics, jealousy and our territorial nature needs to come to an end.”

Fisher’s latest goal is to get Nevada legislators to pass a law that would make it a felony if a person lies to police in order to get an AMBER Alert. He says he has no plans to end his work with AMBER Alerts. “Hundreds of children will celebrate Christmas with their families this year because of the AMBER Alert. Is there anything more important than saving a child?” 🌸

### SEX OFFENDER FACTS:

40% of all sex offenders live in five states: California, Florida, New York, Michigan and Texas.

80% of all states have less than ten people managing sex offenders.

67% of all law enforcement agencies have only one person assigned to sex offenders.

20% of all law enforcement agencies aggressively pursue non-compliant sex offenders by contacting the media

600,000 people are listed on the National Sex Offender Registry

100,000 sex offenders are estimated to have absconded



Utah has developed AMBER Alert “break room” posters for law enforcement and media partners. Posters give the vital steps to take when an alert is issued.

## AMBER FACTS:

AMBER Alert facts  
 Top 5 states for issuing AMBER Alerts in 2006:  
 Michigan 30  
 Texas 24  
 Georgia 19  
 Ohio 18  
 Florida 17

# Idaho summit innovations

Idaho Bureau of Homeland Security Director William Bishop: “We need to create a culture of preparedness. The world is changing and we have to keep up.”

Idaho: home of famous potatoes and some new ways to get the word out about AMBER Alerts. Those ideas came out during the 2006 Broadcast Warning Summit in Boise. Idaho AMBER Alert Coordinator Vicki Miller brought law enforcement officers, broadcasters, transportation officials and emergency management engineers together from several surrounding states to make the emergency alerts more effective.

Here are some of the innovative ideas that were offered by participants to educate the public and others about AMBER Alerts:

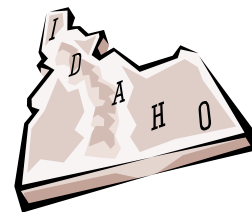
- Place public service announcements in movie theaters.
- Use the Chamber of Commerce or a business liaison to ask companies to use their electronic signs for AMBER Alerts.
- Put bumper stickers or billboards on taxis, buses and other means of public transportation.
- Create a special AMBER Alert license plate for each state.
- Incorporate sign language into AMBER Alerts—possibly using computer generated signing.
- Contact school boards and the PTA to include AMBER Alert curriculum in schools.

The ideas were brought up at the Education and Public Awareness Workshop. Utah AMBER Alert Coordinator Paul Murphy shared that Utah educates the public and key partners with training DVD’s, wallet-sized criteria cards, brochures, break room posters, private business signs, public service announcements, press conferences, commemorative pins, websites and “AMBER Champions,” victims and ordinary citizens who help tell the public about the importance of AMBER Alerts. The state also makes sure the public education efforts on AMBER Alerts reinforce all of the training.

“The AMBER Alert is so important that I am going to do everything I can to make sure every man,

woman and child knows what an AMBER Alert is, how it works and how to bring an abducted child back home safely,” said Murphy.

Despite all of the new technology, Idaho Lt. Governor Mark Ricks reminded everyone that broadcasting is still the best method to educate and alert the public. He told how the Teton Dam broke on June 5, 1976 and flooded the Rexburg area with 80 billion gallons of water. The flood destroyed most means of communication and so people had to rely on two small radio stations that were able to stay on the air.



Nevada Broadcasters Association President Bob Fisher echoed the importance of radio and TV. “Broadcasters are first responders and they have the ability

to get information to people.” Fisher said the public should be thankful for three gifts from the AMBER Alert Plan: (1) forging a real partnership between broadcasters and law enforcement, (2) raising public awareness about the epidemic of missing children, and (3) improving the EAS system.

Terrence Egan from the Washington Military Department Emergency Management System identified problems with most emergency communications: no standardization of communication equipment, communication breakdowns, different priorities, technology, funding, time and different jurisdictions. “Can we piggyback on the success of the AMBER Alert system to be a model for all emergency communications plans?” Egan asked.

A challenge was also given to make sure AMBER Alerts reach deaf and blind people. Marcia Brooks, Project Director for WGBH National Center for Accessible Media, asked everyone to consider how their message is being received by people with visual or hearing impairments.

*continued on next page.*



# Canadian corner

## AMBER in Canada: First Atlantic meeting



Lori St. Onge and Cst. Gary Clow

The Prince Edward Island (PEI) AMBER Missing Child Alert hosted its first Atlantic AMBER Alert Meeting on January 10, 2007, in Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada. AMBER

Alert Coordinators from PEI, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland, as well as the National AMBER Alert Coordinator from Ottawa attended the gathering.

The meeting was facilitated by Phil Keith, Program Director for AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program and Ron Laney, Associate Administrator of the Child Protection Division, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Child Protection Division. They provided information on the history of the AMBER program, National Strategies, case scenarios, secondary distribution, and AMBER Alert

stats.

One of the suggestions that came out of the meeting was having a joint Child Abduction Response Team (CART) training for Canadians and Americans who border the states and provinces to develop a comprehensive child recovery plan to improve the likelihood of the safe recovery of a child in crisis. The U.S. Department of Justice has generously agreed to cover the costs of transportation, accommodations and course registration to Canadian AMBER Alert coordinators to attend CART training.



"The meeting was very helpful in that it gave us the opportunity to ask questions and to hear successes and challenges faced by other AMBER Alert task forces both in the United States and in Canada," agreed Cts. Gary Clow and Lori. St. Onge, PEI AMBER Missing Child Alert Coordinators. "We are very grateful to Ron and Phil for providing us with the opportunity to learn from them so we could build a stronger AMBER Alert Program in our own provinces." ☺

Article written by: Lori St. Onge  
Executive Director, Child Find PEI

### *Idaho, continued from page 4.*

"Improve what currently exists and make it more accessible." For example, she said blind people have difficulty getting information when they miss the closed captioning. She said a possible solution is to make sure every plan offers e-mail alerts.

Idaho Bureau of Homeland Security Director William Bishop closed the conference with this advice: "We need to create a culture of preparedness. The world is changing and we have to keep up. We only get one chance to respond right--- the rest of the time we will only be playing catch-up." ☺

## AMBER INFO:

For AMBER Alert training and technical assistance, contact:

### Phil Keith

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Official AMBER FAQ's:  
877-71-AMBER  
[askamber@fvtc.edu](mailto:askamber@fvtc.edu)

Training & Class registration:  
[www.amber-net.org](http://www.amber-net.org)

## SEX OFFENDER FACTS:

Recidivism after 15 years, all sex offenders

- 24% are charged again with a new crime
- 13% are charged with incest
- 24% are charged with rape
- 16% assault female victims
- 35% assault male victims

Source: Harris and Hanson 2004 review of 10 studies

## Roundtable participants:

John Bish  
Sharon Brooks  
Roy Brown  
Rebecca DeMauro  
Alene Hayes  
Maureen & Denise Himebaugh  
Colleen & Taryn Nick  
Elizabeth Norton Baker  
Abby & Sam Potash  
Joe Bill & Kathy Rogers  
Erin Runnion  
Carol & Lindsay Ryan  
Don & Claudine Ryce  
Samiah Baroni (Seramur)  
Ed & Lois Smart  
Bob & Gay Smither

### AMBER FACTS:

Utah issued its first AMBER Alert on June 5, 2002 after 14-year-old Elizabeth Smart was kidnapped at knifepoint from her home. California issued its first AMBER Alert on August 1, 2002 after 16-year-old Tamara Brooks and 17-year-old Jacqueline Marris were abducted by a man with a gun.

# Victims and survivors offer advice about AMBER Alerts

"It's the club no one wants to belong to." That is how Ed Smart, the father of kidnap victim Elizabeth Smart, described the group that gathered in San Diego to discuss the impact a child abduction has on families. Smart was one of 24 people invited by the Department of Justice to the Victims and Survivors Roundtable in January.

Sharon Brooks, the mother of kidnap victim Tamara Brooks, said the Roundtable was phenomenal. "It was very positive and very emotional. Everyone took their tragedies to form something good. It made me want to do more."



Sharon Brooks and daughter Tamara Brooks

The Department of Justice wanted to learn first hand how to improve AMBER Alert plans and help law enforcement and prosecutors improve their responses to missing and abducted children cases. "We talked about where law enforcement is strong and where it is weak and how it can be improved," said Smart. "We know what worked, what didn't and where more help is needed."

Here are some of the key issues identified by the family members:

- **Parents as Suspects** - Officers need to explain immediately why parents might be considered suspects and allow them to take a polygraph early so they can be eliminated from being suspects.
- **First Responders** - First responders need to be trained why cases involving missing and endangered children need to be handled quickly and with a high priority.
- **CART & New Laws** - It is critical for states to form Child Abduction Response Teams and to promote laws that will offer consistency in the way law enforcement handles missing children, runaways and abductions.

- **Communication** - Families need a liaison to offer updates on the case, explain law enforcement tactics and help with effectively using the media.

"Families need help on how to deal with the media bombardment," said Brooks. "Everyone had trouble learning how to deal with the press." She also said counseling was needed for families and victims to get back to some sense of normalcy.

Participants agreed that someone was needed who could take them from the beginning to the end, from the start of the investigation to the end of the prosecution. They also discovered that every law enforcement agency handles child abduction cases differently. One disturbing trend emerged during the discussion that some law enforcement and prosecutors were insensitive and even less than honest about what was happening in the case.

Overall, the Department of Justice staff learned that training is critical to helping victims, and will use the information gathered at the roundtable to shape training and assist in state and local policy development. 🌙

### AMBER FACTS:

In 2006, 260 alerts were issued for 314 children.

241 cases were resolved, 47 resolved due to the AMBER Alert. Nine children died and 10 cases remain active.

NCIC entries were made for only 215 children.

Of the 215 children entered into NCIC, the listings for 145 children (67%) were removed within 3 hours.



Ed and Lois Smart with daughter Elizabeth

# The miracle in Missouri

## An AMBER Alert account from the front lines

Missouri AMBER Alert Coordinator Kim Hull knew he needed something to help missing children who didn't fit the criteria for an AMBER Alert. The Missouri State



**Capt. Kim Hull**

Highway Patrol Captain spent six months developing an Endangered Person Advisory for his state.

"I saw a real need because we were getting AMBER Alert requests for everything, including one for the elderly that was to be called the Golden Alert," said

Hull. "People call in and ask for an AMBER Alert and it's difficult to say no."



**Ben Ownby**

It turns out the Endangered Person Advisory was needed only a week after it was ready. On January 8, 13-year-old Ben Ownby got off a school bus at 3:45 p.m. with a friend but never made it home. Ben's father called for help and the sheriff considered issuing an AMBER Alert at

7:15 p.m. However, no one saw him disappear and the sheriff didn't have any proof he had been kidnapped.

"The initial call unfortunately did not meet the criteria of an Amber Alert," said Sergeant Keverne McCollum of the Missouri State Highway Patrol. "It was good that we had something to do except tell law enforcement they needed to contact the media."



**Capt. Keverne McCollum**

The state's first Endangered Person Advisory went out at 8:24 p.m. Law enforcement was noti-

fied through teletype message channels and the media received the advisory through the Public Information Officer's media e-mail list. The media coverage was extensive and hundreds of leads started coming in for the missing boy. "The next morning someone said they saw the boy being pushed into a white pickup truck," said Hull.

Twelve hours after the advisory went out, authorities finally had enough information to issue an AMBER Alert. Three days later deputies spotted a white pickup that matched the description from the witness. The deputies searched the truck owner's apartment and found Ben Ownby and Shawn Hornbeck, a 15-year-old boy who had been missing since 2002.



**Darlene Crocker**

"You've got to be kidding," Hull responded when he found out two boys had been found. "It was unbelievable that they found the other boy. We were looking for him for a long time."

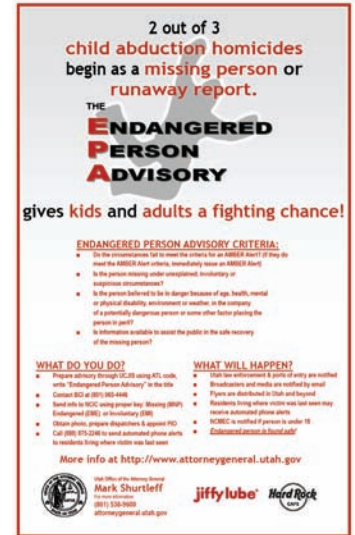
Missing Persons Clearinghouse Unit Manager Darlene Crocker calls the recovery a miracle. "I hope this encourages more people to report things that don't seem right and that law enforcement will keep looking beyond the initial 'stop.'"

Crocker has high praises for the new advisory. "The Endangered Person Advisory is one of the best tools we have. It seems like with the public and some law enforcement, that if a situation did not meet the AMBER criteria that there was nothing being done or nothing that could be done."

Now Hull is tweaking this newly developed tool for the next time. "We got the information out and it really helped law enforcement. It worked out pretty good."

### AMBER FACTS:

A 2005 study found that half of all AMBER Alerts were issued for white children and half were issued for non-white children.



Utah has developed Endangered Person Alert "break room" posters for law enforcement and media partners. Posters give the vital steps to take when an EPA is issued.



**Shawn Hornbeck, 15, looks on as his mother Pam Akers talks to the media Saturday, Jan. 13, 2007**

# Odds and ends:

## Important information, resources and events

### Mark your calendars for the National AMBER Alert Conference 2007

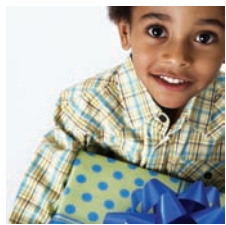
The 2007 National AMBER Alert Conference will be held on November 13-16 in Denver.



This three-and-half day conference will include multiple tracks involving AMBER Alert coordinators, broadcasters and media, state clearing-houses, Association of

Missing and Exploited Children's Organization, survivor families, tribal communities, international and border countries, governor's offices, law enforcement, departments of transportation and others. The conference will be held at the Grand Hyatt Denver.

### AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program: Is your community prepared to recover missing and abducted children?



The U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs and Fox Valley Technical College are pleased to announce the 2007 AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program. Tuition, transportation, lodging, and

training materials are provided for non-federal employees. All participants are responsible for meals, ground transportation, and incidental expenses. Federal employees are also responsible for transportation and lodging expenses. The 2007 training courses include:

- **Investigative Strategies for Missing and Abducted Children (ISMAC)**

This 4 and ½ day course is designed for first responders, investigators, and supervisors who are responsible for investigating incidents of missing or abducted children.

- **Child Abduction Response Team (CART)**

This 4 and ½ day course is designed to build multi-disciplinary, multi-jurisdictional response teams to assist in the investigation and recovery of missing or abducted children.

- **Basic Forensic Response to Missing and Abducted Children**

This 2 and ½ day course is designed to enhance the law enforcement response to collection, preservation, and forensic evidence gathering at crime scenes that involve missing or abducted children.

- **Leadership for Missing and Abducted Children**



This 2 day course is designed for law enforcement executives and senior policy makers to enhance their policies and responses to incidents of

missing and abducted children.

- **AMBER and the Media**

This 2 day course is designed for public information officers, spokespersons, and chief executive officers of law enforcement agencies who respond to media inquiries related to missing and abducted children.

- **Newsplex**

This 1 day course is designed for AMBER Alert Coordinators, media representatives (television and radio), and public information officers to give scenario-based training on the issuance of AMBER Alerts.

## NEW PILOT TRAINING!

- **Advanced Investigative Strategies and Techniques for Child Abduction Cases**

This 4 and ½ day training program involves abducted and murdered children cases and will include legal issues, forensic evidence collection, computer forensics, interviewing and interrogation, cold cases, human trafficking, information use, and resource sharing. This is a pilot program and attendance will be restricted to experienced investigative or supervisory personnel. For information on this pilot program, please contact Fox Valley Technical College at askamber@fvtc.edu. ☾

## AMBER FACTS:

In 2006, AMBER Alerts were not issued in: Alaska, Delaware, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Idaho, Maine, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New Mexico, Rhode Island, Vermont and Wyoming.

## The AMBER Advocate

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