

## 5-09/120.07 - California Child Safety Amber Network Procedures (Amber Alert)

This policy describes procedures for initiating a California Child Safety Amber Network alert, also known as an AMBER (America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response) ALERT. The California Child Safety AMBER Network (CCSAN) consists of the following:

- The Emergency Alert System (EAS) is a nationwide system designed to inform the public of an emergency. It is accessed through the California Emergency Management Agency (CAL-EMA);
- The Emergency Digital Information System (EDIS) is a direct computer link to media outlets and other agencies. Information may be printed, broadcast, read on-air, or captioned on television;
- Technology to Recover Abducted Kids (TRAK) is an image-based investigative tool which links state, county, and local law enforcement agencies together. The system is capable of simultaneously sending information and photographs directly to multiple locations and media outlets; and
- California Highway Patrol's changeable electronic message signs (CMS) utilizes California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) highway transportation system signs located on major highways throughout the state. Portable signs can be placed in other locations as needed.

In order for an abduction to qualify for an AMBER Alert, all four of the following conditions must exist:

- It has been confirmed that an abduction has occurred;
- The victim must be 17 years old or younger or have a proven mental or physical disability;
- The victim is in imminent danger of serious bodily injury or death; and
- Information is available that, if disseminated to the public, could assist in the safe recovery of the victim.

An AMBER Alert is not appropriate when:

- There is no evidence of foul play;
- The child is a runaway;
- The abduction is due to a custody dispute and there is no reason to expect a threat to the life or physical health of the child; and/or
- An adult is missing, unless there is proven physical or mental disability that may subject the victim to imminent danger

**NOTE:** If the abduction does not satisfy the AMBER Alert criteria outlined above but the handling Station/Unit Watch Commander feels the situation merits attention, contact the SCC Watch Commander for possible options such as issuing an "ABDUCTION" Alert which involves the creation and distribution of an EDIS bulletin.

### DESK PERSONNEL RESPONSIBILITIES:

When desk personnel receive a call for service regarding a child abduction, they shall attempt to determine the circumstances involved in the abduction prior to dispatching units. It is important to determine if the abduction was a kidnapping for ransom or extortion. To make this determination, desk personnel should ask a series of questions such as, "Do you know the suspect?", "Do you know any reason why someone would want

to abduct the child?”, “Has there been a demand for ransom for the safe return of the child?”, “Has the informant/family member(s) received any type of threat prior to the abduction?”, “Did the suspect make any statement at the time of abduction regarding instructions not to notify law enforcement?”

If there is any indication that the crime is a kidnapping for ransom or extortion desk personnel shall not proceed with an AMBER Alert but instead notify Station/Unit detectives and Major Crimes Bureau immediately. Desk personnel shall not dispatch a patrol car or uniformed deputies unless ordered to do so by Station/Unit detectives or Major Crimes Bureau. All kidnapping for ransom cases will be considered confidential until the case is resolved.

If the abduction does not appear to be a kidnapping for ransom or extortion, and the abduction meets the criteria for an AMBER Alert as outlined previously above, desk personnel receiving information necessitating an immediate field response shall handle and dispatch such calls in accordance with desk operation procedures.

If the Station/Unit activates an EOC after an AMBER Alert is initiated, all calls received by desk personnel pertaining to the AMBER Alert shall be forwarded to the EOC. If the information necessitates an immediate field response, personnel shall handle and dispatch such calls in accordance with desk operation procedures.

When the Station/Unit EOC is not activated, desk personnel shall field all calls and log all contacts where information has been provided in response to the AMBER Alert issued by the Station/Unit. Desk personnel shall relay all information received relating to the abduction to Station/Unit detectives or designated personnel as it is received. If telephone calls increase in number, requiring additional personnel to adequately handle the volume of calls, desk personnel shall inform the Station/Unit Watch Commander. The Station/Unit Watch Commander may increase desk staffing or activate the Station/Unit EOC in order to handle all calls expeditiously.

#### FIELD DEPUTY'S RESPONSIBILITIES:

When a deputy receives a call of a child abduction that has just occurred, the deputy shall respond to the location without delay and conduct a preliminary investigation. The preliminary investigation shall be thorough enough to establish that a crime has occurred. The handling deputy shall collect specific information in order to determine if the circumstances meet the criteria necessary to initiate an AMBER Alert. If the deputy's investigation reveals that the abduction may be a kidnapping for ransom or extortion, all uniform presence should be removed from the location and Station/Unit Detectives, along with Major Crimes Bureau, should be contacted immediately.

#### Qualified AMBER Alerts

If the handling deputy determines that the abduction qualifies for an AMBER Alert, he/she shall notify the Station/Unit Watch Sergeant and Watch Commander immediately by telephone. The deputy shall provide them with details of the abduction in order to initiate an AMBER Alert, if approved.

If the decision is made to initiate an AMBER Alert, the handling deputy shall request a recent photograph of the abducted person(s) and, if available, photographs of the suspect(s) and/or the suspect vehicle from the informant and/or relatives. The photograph(s) should be recent and clearly display the victim's and/or suspect's facial features. The handling deputy shall ensure the photograph(s) is driven to the Station/Unit and

delivered to the Watch Commander without delay.

The handling deputy shall immediately complete a Missing Person Report (SH-R-12) and follow missing/abducted persons procedures.

#### WATCH SERGEANT AND WATCH COMMANDER RESPONSIBILITIES:

The decision to request an AMBER Alert is the responsibility of the Station/Unit Watch Commander. The Watch Commander shall base this decision on the established AMBER criteria and facts obtained by the handling deputy regarding the abduction. If the decision is made to request an AMBER Alert, the Watch Commander shall:

- Consider activation of the Station's/Unit's EOC in order to handle the anticipated increase in the volume of phone calls to the Station/Unit and institute a clue management system;
- Immediately complete an AMBER Request Form (available in Outlook under Public Folders / All Public Folders / All Forms / Patrol / Miscellaneous / AMBER Request Form);
- Complete the AMBER Request Form and send it to the SCC Bridge e-mail group. If e-mail is not available, fax the form to SCC at (323) 261-4936;
- Immediately upon completion of the above steps, contact the Sheriff's Communications Center (SCC) Watch Commander at (323) 267-2504 to advise of the new AMBER Request Form sent via e-mail;
- Immediately notify Major Crimes Bureau as Amber Alerts are their responsibility;
- When the handling Station/Unit receives information which updates or corrects what was previously reported, they shall send a new AMBER Request Form to SCC. If there is an update, such as additional information, the "Update" box shall be checked and if there is a correction, such as the color of the suspect vehicle, the "Correction" box shall be checked; and
- All updates or corrections that have been e-mailed to the SCC Bridge e-mail group shall be followed up with a telephone call to the SCC Watch Commander to ensure the information has been received.

The Watch Sergeant shall:

- Handle any functions delegated to him/her by the Watch Commander; and
- If the EOC is activated, ensure it is adequately staffed to receive a high volume of telephone calls.

#### SHERIFF'S COMMUNICATIONS CENTER RESPONSIBILITIES:

The *final decision* to initiate an AMBER Alert shall be the responsibility of the SCC Watch Commander. After receiving the abduction information from the Station/Unit and consulting the Station/Unit Watch Commander, the SCC Watch Commander shall determine if the abduction meets the AMBER Alert criteria. If the criteria is not met (e.g. victim is 18 years old), the SCC Watch Commander shall discuss other available options with the Station/Unit Watch Commander and Major Crimes Bureau to determine the best course of action.

If an AMBER Alert is to be initiated, the SCC Watch Commander shall ensure that the Sheriff's Headquarters Bureau is notified of the Amber Alert.

Necessary data shall be immediately entered into the JDIC screen designed to notify the Emergency Digital Information Service (EDIS) of an abduction.

An audio message shall be recorded describing the abductor, the victim, and any vehicle or other pertinent information. This audio message will be used on the Emergency Alert System. Photographs of the victim will not, in most cases, be available for the initial JDIC/EDIS message. Therefore, once the JDIC/EDIS message is complete, with or without the photograph, it shall be sent immediately.

After the EDIS alert has been broadcast, the SCC Watch Commander shall initiate an Emergency Alert System warning message. This EAS warning message will be received by various media agencies, who may or may not broadcast the AMBER Alert message.

Upon receipt of any photographs, SCC shall forward all scanned images of victim/suspect via e-mail to the California Highway Patrol Emergency Notification and Tactical Alert Center (ENTAC). After the e-mail has been sent, the SCC Watch Commander shall telephone ENTAC to confirm receipt of photographs and request they be entered into the TRAK system. The SCC Watch Commander shall also request the CHP to begin posting victim/suspect/vehicle information on Changeable Message Signs within the designated target area.

#### Countywide Law Enforcement Broadcast (C-Code)

The SCC Watch Commander shall ensure that a crime broadcast regarding the child abduction is sent utilizing the C-Code. This will verbally notify all Sheriff's Stations/Units and law enforcement agencies within the County of Los Angeles regarding the incident.

#### National Warning System (NAWAS)

The SCC Watch Commander shall ensure that a request is made via NAWAS to notify surrounding counties' communications centers or state Office Emergency Services centers of the AMBER Alert.

#### Sheriff's Data Terminal (SDT)

The SCC Watch Commander shall ensure that a crime broadcast is disseminated throughout all Sheriff's Data Terminals, as well as through the Los Angeles California Highway Patrol Communication Center.

#### SHERIFF'S HEADQUARTERS BUREAU RESPONSIBILITIES:

Sheriff's Headquarters Bureau personnel, after receiving notification from SCC, and after consulting with Major Crimes Bureau, shall immediately prepare an informational message for "City News Service" and "NIXLE." The message shall be sent to both agencies as soon as they are complete.

#### PROCEDURES FOR ACTIVATIONS IN LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES WITHIN LOS ANGELES COUNTY:

The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Communications Center is the "point of contact" for AMBER Alerts for law enforcement agencies within the County of Los Angeles. When a Los Angeles County law enforcement agency requests activation of the AMBER Alert system, the agency shall contact the SCC Watch Commander. Once the information is confirmed, the SCC Watch Commander shall ensure the activation is broadcast according to this policy. All questions regarding AMBER Alerts from other law enforcement agencies within

Los Angeles County should be directed to Sheriff's Communications Center at (323) 267-2504.

**PROCEDURES FOR ACTIVATIONS IN OTHER COUNTIES:**

When the Department is alerted regarding a surrounding county's activation of the AMBER Alert system, SCC Watch Commander shall contact the reporting county and confirm the information. SCC will take the necessary steps to ensure the message is broadcast. All questions regarding AMBER Alerts from other counties should be directed to Sheriff's Communication Center at (323) 881-8100.

**NOTIFICATION OF FOUND VICTIM:**

The Watch Commander at the Station/Unit which initiated the AMBER Alert is responsible for notifying the Sheriff's Communication Center Watch Commander when the victim has been found. It is the responsibility of the SCC Watch Commander to make C-Code and NAWS notifications.

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