



**RAPID EMERGENCY
CHILD ALERT
SYSTEM**

2023

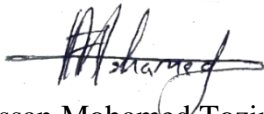
Foreword

At the Wapo Wapi Foundation, we firmly believe that every child deserves to live a safe and happy life, free from the fear of abduction or exploitation. Our mission is to work collaboratively towards a safer future for children by raising awareness, advocating for better policies, and providing support to families and communities impacted by child disappearances.

The reasons for a child's absence are often complex and diverse and cannot be viewed in isolation from their home circumstances or experiences of care. Therefore, it is crucial that professionals involved in such cases collaborate to ensure a consistent and coherent response is provided to the child upon their return.

Currently, there is no harmonized international strategy to adequately address the issue of missing children. To tackle this problem, we have adopted the Rapid Emergency Alert System from AMBER Alert Europe and the International Center for Missing and Exploited Children. This system will help to establish a robust global searching system for high-risk and emergency missing child cases.

The Rapid Emergency Child Alert System will work alongside other policies and procedures designed to support the quick and safe recovery of a missing child perceived to be at high risk or in danger.



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1.0 Introduction

Studies from various countries show that the first three hours after a child goes missing are critical. The success rate of a safe recovery can decrease rapidly based on known circumstances that contributed to the child's disappearance and the perceived risks or dangers to the child. Therefore, it is crucial for law enforcement agencies to have a well-planned response to act quickly and effectively.

One of the essential tools to help recover missing and abducted children is a rapid emergency child alert system. The first-ever such system, known as the AMBER Alert, was established in the United States in 1996 and named after Amber Hagerman, a 9-year-old girl who was abducted while riding her bicycle in Arlington, Texas, and later found murdered. Since then, many other countries have adopted similar systems, often also called AMBER Alert, although other names have been used. An alert system is a voluntary partnership among law enforcement agencies, broadcasters, social and other media, transportation agencies, NGOs, and others working together to disseminate urgent bulletins in the most serious missing children cases. The goal is to engage the entire community to assist in the search and safe recovery of a missing child by providing detailed information to the public about the missing child and, if applicable, any adult accompanying the child. To date, 24 countries worldwide have adopted similar alert systems, in addition to ours, to recover missing and abducted children as soon as possible.

The following guidelines will be taken into account when developing an alert system, although the list is not exhaustive and will be tailored to respond to local needs and context.

2.0 Setting up a rapid emergency child alert system

To ensure proper operation of a Rapid Emergency Child Alert System, a process must be in place. It is crucial to consider alerts as "special" and only use them for the highest risk cases to prevent the public from becoming desensitized. The process should be well understood, robust, and capable of handling both large and small surveys.

When establishing such an alert system, a multi-disciplinary approach is necessary, including law enforcement, distribution partners, and appropriate entities such as NGOs. Each entity has resources to assist in the successful dissemination of the alert. It is essential that each entity understands their responsibilities and how to collaborate effectively with all other parties involved. For instance, law enforcement makes the decision of when to launch an alert and what information can be released to the public. On the other hand, we support the distribution

mechanism by rebroadcasting to partners, posting on our website, social networks, and app. Distribution partners focus on disseminating the alert as quickly and widely as needed.

In conclusion, implementing a Rapid Emergency Child Alert System requires a well-defined and collaborative process that involves various entities, resources, and responsibilities. By taking a multi-disciplinary approach, we can ensure that alerts are only used in the highest risk cases and disseminated effectively to reach as many people as possible in the shortest time possible.

2.1 Criteria to Launch an Alert

Each alert system has its own criteria for launching, depending on local needs and context. However, the key criteria for launching an alert system are:

- The child must be under 18 years old;
- The child must be in imminent danger of serious harm or death; and
- There must be sufficient information available to enable the public to assist the police in locating the child.

It is important that the criteria be simple and clear to avoid any possible misunderstandings. It is essential to note that even if a case does not meet the alert criteria, other resources are available to help recover the child. All agencies involved should be familiar with all available resources, determine which ones are appropriate in a given case, and be able to explain why an alert may or may not have been issued, as well as what alternative course of action may have been taken instead.

2.2 Decision Making Process

To ensure that the alert system is used appropriately, a protocol will be implemented to specify who will work with the law enforcement agency authorized to launch an alert. This individual must be informed early in the process of a missing child report and understand the circumstances surrounding the disappearance. Ideally, the person should have experience managing an incident room, prioritizing leads, and making quick decisions regarding the investigation.

When considering whether to launch an alert, this person will collaborate with law enforcement to assess the following questions:

- What is the risk to the child?

- Is there enough information available for the public to recognize the child and/or the adult(s) accompanying them?
- Is the media already covering the missing child story, and what impact will an alert have?

When a decision to launch an alert is made, it is crucial to inform all in-country law enforcement agencies and the multi-disciplinary team of the alert. They should be instructed on who to contact if approached by the public or media to avoid confusion and ensure rapid dissemination of information to law enforcement and dissemination partners. Protocols for these notifications should be developed in collaboration with the multi-disciplinary team and regularly tested to ensure their effectiveness.

2.3 Risk Assessment

The decision to issue an alert for a missing child heavily relies on the level of risk that the child is facing. A reliable assessment or triage process must be promptly in place and conducted efficiently. Typically, an experienced missing person specialist or a pre-selected committee carries out the assessment.

It is strongly recommended to continually review the assessment during the investigation since the level of danger that the missing child is facing may change based on updated information. This is crucial because new details may emerge, leading to changes in the level of risk that the missing child might be exposed to.

2.4 Number for Receiving Calls

The public will be provided with a unique telephone number to report any relevant information about a missing child. This predetermined number will remain unchanged even after the launch of an alert to help the public associate it with the alert. The number may be different from the national emergency police number to allow call-takers to easily differentiate the information received and give priority to the alert. National protocols will be adjusted to ensure that any information received, whether through the national emergency police number or the unique alert number, is promptly provided to the investigation team. This measure aims to streamline the process and increase the efficiency of the investigation team's efforts in locating the missing child.

2.5 Call Handling Capacity

Issuing an alert is likely to result in a high volume of public calls, which may vary depending on the perceived risk to the missing child and the seriousness of the case in different areas. Therefore, it is crucial to have a robust call handling system with enough personnel to handle and prioritize all calls. As previously mentioned, it may be necessary to implement a separate call system alongside the national emergency number. If possible, the call handling system should have rollover capability to ensure that all calls are answered.

When using social media to distribute alerts, it is essential to consider a mechanism that can monitor social media sites and prioritize any leads received. This will ensure that relevant information is shared with law enforcement, and the search for the missing child is conducted in a coordinated and efficient manner.

2.6 Call Assessment

Regardless of the number of calls or leads received, it is crucial to evaluate their relevance to the child's recovery and determine how law enforcement will respond. Some calls may require an immediate investigation, while others may need more information to establish their relevance to the case. All actions taken for each call will be recorded in a single system to keep track of the outstanding investigative tasks.

Each call or lead, no matter how many, should be carefully assessed to ensure its relevance to the investigation and the child's recovery. Depending on the situation, some calls may demand an immediate response, while others may need further investigation to establish their importance. To track all investigative tasks, every action taken for each call will be documented in a single system.

2.7 Engagement with and Coordination of Media and Other Distribution Outlets

Early engagement with the media is crucial when setting up an alert system to ensure they comprehend the alert system's purpose, functionality, and the reason for its creation. The media can also help in educating the public about the alert system. Apart from traditional media outlets, the alert system will be distributed via social media, the internet, apps, digital advertising boards, highway signs, transport providers, and other channels. Alternative systems will be established to disseminate information if any of the distribution mechanisms fail. This enhances the alert system's reach and reliability. It is vital to review the existing distribution mechanisms regularly to ensure they operate correctly and current protocols are in place. Moreover, it is crucial to evaluate new technology that could assist in distributing alerts.

When the alert is issued, it will be necessary to coordinate with the media to disseminate the alert message to the public, requesting them to look out for the missing child. Additional communication will be required once the alert is deactivated to inform the public that they no longer need to search for the child and provide them with the alert's outcome.

2.8 Dissemination Methods

Efficient dissemination of alerts is essential to avoid duplicate data entry and confusion. Sophisticated systems possess the following capabilities:

- Single data entry
- Standardized messaging
- Outlet selection
- Geographic targeting of the dissemination

These capabilities allow for the most effective and efficient dissemination of alerts possible. By permitting single data entry, the system reduces the risk of errors and streamlines the process. Standardized messaging ensures that the alert is consistent and clear across all outlets. The ability to choose which outlets to use enables a targeted approach to reach the intended audience. Finally, the geographic targeting of the dissemination enables alerts to be sent to specific regions where the child is most likely to be found, thus increasing the chances of a safe recovery.

2.9 Alert Message

To effectively locate a missing child, an alert message should be concise and precise, enabling the public to read it quickly. Ideally, the message should contain the following information, if available:

- The missing child's name
- The child's age
- The location where the child was last seen
- A description of the child's clothing
- Whether the child is accompanied by an adult, and if so, a description of the adult
- A description of any associated vehicles

The primary purpose of the message is to help the public identify the missing child and/or the person they are with. Therefore, it is crucial to include unique identifiers such as photos of the child, person, or vehicle involved.

The alert message should also provide a specialized phone number for reporting information. Depending on law enforcement advice, a disclaimer may be necessary, asking the public not to approach the child or the accompanying adult but to call the appropriate authority.

The alert message should be reviewed periodically and updated with new information. The frequency of updates may depend on the individual case. A deactivation message should also be created to inform the public to stop searching for the child and provide any outcome information.

2.10 Right to Erasure

During the investigation process, the well-being of the child is of utmost importance, especially when deciding whether to issue an alert. If there are concerns that continued public dissemination of the alert and shared information could possibly jeopardize the child's safety in the future (e.g., during job or university applications), efforts will be made to remove any digital footprint, where feasible.

2.11 After Care

Giving consideration to the care and support required for a missing child and their family after they have been found is of utmost importance. The events that led to the alert and the extensive media coverage they may have received can significantly impact their lives. Involving NGOs and social services can be highly beneficial in providing the necessary support.

It is crucial to recognize that the aftermath of the incident can be traumatic for the child and their family, and specialized care may be required. Moreover, extensive media coverage can exacerbate the stress of the situation, making it even more critical to have adequate support in place. Engaging NGOs and social services can provide the necessary resources to help the child and their family cope and recover from the experience.

2.12 Cross Border Issues

Establishing communication, written protocols, and collaboration with neighboring law enforcement authorities are essential in the event that a missing child travels to another country. If the neighboring country does not have an alert system in place, or if the case does not meet

their alert criteria, we recommend having other resources available to assist in the recovery of the missing child.

It is crucial to have a coordinated approach when dealing with cross-border missing child cases. Clear communication channels, standardized protocols, and collaborative efforts among law enforcement agencies can increase the chances of locating the missing child and bringing them back to safety. Therefore, we emphasize the importance of establishing effective partnerships with neighboring countries and having contingency plans in place to ensure swift and effective action in the event of a cross-border missing child case.

2.13 Review Process

It is crucial to conduct a debriefing or review of the alert and investigation to enhance the effectiveness of the alert system. This process enables us to identify what worked and what did not, and to gather valuable lessons learned for future events. All stakeholders involved in the alert, including media, transportation ministries, non-governmental organizations, and technology companies, will participate in the review process. Our primary objective throughout the review process will be to remain impartial, with the aim of making the alert system stronger and more efficient.

2.14 Training

Training is a crucial component for the success of the alert system. Therefore, it will be conducted at the outset to assist all stakeholders involved, including law enforcement, NGOs, and social services, in understanding the alert system and their respective responsibilities. Additionally, ongoing training will be provided to raise awareness of new dissemination mechanisms and protocols put in place, as well as to train new personnel.

Moreover, training will be offered to different stakeholders to enhance collaboration and minimize confusion regarding responsibilities. This will ensure that everyone involved in the alert system is well-prepared and capable of working together effectively. Our aim is to develop a knowledgeable and capable team that can promptly respond to any emergency situation and bring about the safe recovery of a missing child. By offering comprehensive training, we can increase the effectiveness of the alert system and contribute to the safety of our communities.

3.0 Response to escalating concerns

If a child goes missing repeatedly, we will hold formal intervention meetings in response to growing concerns. To ensure the effectiveness of these meetings and improve our collective

responses, it is essential to have appropriate participation and a clear purpose. The law enforcement or any other organization should notify the need for an intervention meeting and ensure it takes place within a week of any triggering episode.

During the meeting, we will attempt to identify any "push" or "pull" factors in the case and involve any voluntary or statutory agencies that have an interest or may have an interest in the welfare and circumstances of the missing child. In cases of "pull" factors, we may need to target members of the community who may be harboring or exploiting the missing child for criminal, sexual, or drug-related purposes.

The minutes of the meeting must include a clear action plan with timelines for action, named responsible professionals, risk/contingency planning, and regular review dates. We will share notes from the meeting with all invited professionals.

Appendix

Appendix 01: Case Investigation Flow Chart

