

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM
CITY OF SHORELINE, WASHINGTON

<p>AGENDA TITLE: Amber Alert Program DEPARTMENT: Police PRESENTED BY: Chief Denise Pentony</p>

PROBLEM/ISSUE STATEMENT:

The Shoreline Police, in cooperation with the King County Chief's Association and the King County Sheriff's Office have been working towards the establishment of the AMBER Alert Program within the Sheriff's Office. The program is being implemented across our region and across the country. The program has a start-up date of October 24th, 2002.

AMBER stands for America's Missing Broadcast Emergency Response. This program evolved from the abduction of 9-year-old Amber Hagerman in Arlington, Texas on January 13th, 1996. Four days after her abduction her body was found behind an area apartment complex. Her death had such an impact on her community and throughout Texas that this plan was developed to help recover abducted children.

The implementation of this program in King County will help should a child be abducted or kidnapped. Getting the word out is key in resolving such cases within a few hours of abduction, with the intention of preventing death or serious harm to the child. This program is effective and has worked in many cases across the nation.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYZED:

Two alternatives were examined. The first alternative was a "status quo" response. The King County Sheriff's Office has an excellent missing/abduction response protocol, however it does not have the notification systems in place that the AMBER Alert does.

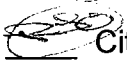

The second alternative was to embrace the AMBER Alert and collaborate with all law enforcement agencies, Washington State Department of Transportation, and all forms of the Media. The second alternative would only enhance the protocols in place at this time and thus, the program was adopted.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

This program has no fiscal impact on Shoreline.

RECOMMENDATION

No action is required by Council this evening.

Approved By: City Manager  City Attorney 

INTRODUCTION

AMBER stands for America's Missing Broadcast Emergency Response. This program evolved from the abduction of 9-year-old Amber Hagerman in Arlington, Texas on January 13th, 1996. Four days after her abduction her body was found behind an area apartment complex. Her death had such an impact on her community and throughout Texas that this plan was developed to help recover abducted children.

The AMBER Program utilizes a County's Emergency Alert System (EAS) to notify local media of AMBER Alert abduction. The EAS is the system that most of us remember as being used in the event of missile attack in the Cold War era. Local media (radio, television, cable, etc.) upon the EAS notification of an AMBER Alert, have agreed to broadcast provided suspect and victim information 4 times an hour for the first 2 hours, 2 times an hour for the next 4 hours, and then once an hour until the Alert is cancelled by the initiating law enforcement agency or at the media's discretion if longer than 24 hours. Local media agree to interrupt any of their normal broadcast programs or sporting events to provide these AMBER Alert messages.

According to a study by the United States Department of Justice, 74 percent of the children who are kidnapped and later found murdered are killed within the first 3 hours after being taken. Time becomes the critical factor in locating suspects and their victims in these cases. Since we are such a mobile society, the likelihood that a motorist (having heard the AMBER Alert information on their car radio) may actually see a suspect or suspect vehicle drive by is very high. With an entire community alerted to act as an extension of local law enforcement the odds of a successful recovery on an abducted child before the lapse of 3 hours are very great.

BACKGROUND

How will it work?

A. Once a officer arrives at a reported abduction incident they will screen for 5 main elements:

1. Is the victim under 16 years of age?
2. Victim is not a voluntary runaway (previous history of runaway is not a sole factor for exclusion).
3. A risk of injury or death to the victim is present based upon facts of the investigation and the judgement of the investigating deputy/detective.
4. There must be enough descriptive information available to believe that its dissemination to the public could help locate the child, suspect and/or suspect vehicle.
5. The incident must be reported and investigated by the Sheriff's Office.

**** Based on the above criteria, the following situations would not qualify for an AMBER Alert: Missing child believed to have run away from home; missing child taken by a non-custodial relative in a child custody case; lost child; and, police search for criminal suspects (murder, bank robbery, etc.).**

The officer notifies their on-duty supervisor if they feel an AMBER Alert should be made.

B. The on-duty supervisor (once notified) will:

1. Contact their chain-of-command (Captain or higher) within their Section or Precinct or the Command Duty Officer (CDO) to review the incident. **The Captain or higher will determine whether or not to initiate an AMBER Alert.**
2. The Command person will make certain a case report is being written for the incident.
3. Advise the on call Major Crimes Unit supervisor of the incident.
4. Insure that the King County Regional AMBER Alert report and Media Notification are faxed to the Communications Center (if the AMBER Alert is approved).
5. The Communications Center supervisor will verify the receipt of the AMBER Alert documents.

C. The Captain, CDO or other Command level member will:

1. Approve (if applicable) an AMBER Alert without unnecessary delay.
2. Make sure that there is enough descriptive information for the Alert.
3. Consider if it is in the best interest of the victim to not issue an Alert because of confidential circumstances, i.e. ransom demands or death threat to child if AMBER Alert is heard by suspect(s).
4. Notify the Chain-of-Command/CDO and Media Relations Officer as appropriate.
5. Insure a cancellation of the AMBER Alert is made via the Com. Center EAS as applicable (suspect arrested, child recovered, etc.).

D. The Communications Center will:

1. Utilize the EAS for an AMBER Alert notification to local media (example):
"This is an activation of the AMBER Alert Plan. The King County Sheriff's Office is looking for a child believed to be abducted, who was last seen at 4th Avenue SW and SW 152nd Street in the City of Burien and is believed to be in danger. The child's name is David Strong. He is a 7-year-old Hispanic male with very short (crew cut) hair and was last seen wearing a yellow short-sleeved T-shirt, green shorts, and black high-top Nike sports shoes. The suspect is a clean shaven adult Asian male about 25 years old last seen wearing a blue zip-front hooded sweatshirt, black T-shirt, and baggy blue jeans with red colored patched at the knees. They may be traveling in a red 1998 Honda Accord 2-door sedan with a partial Washington license plate of ADE 3___. This car was last seen heading North on 1st Avenue South from SW 152nd Street in the City of Burien. If you have any information on the whereabouts of this child, please call 911 immediately."
2. Notify other 911 Centers (WSP, Valley Com., etc.) of the AMBER Alert for broadcast to their police personnel.
3. The Com. Center will receive calls and fill out "tips sheets" for forwarding to the appropriate Incident Investigative Command Post (CP). "Tips sheets" from other 911 centers will be received via a fax and also provided to the CP personnel.
4. Notify media via the EAS when the AMBER Alert has been cancelled.

DISCUSSION

The AMBER Alert program will enhance our ability to recover children that have been abducted and could be facing a life-threatening situation. Police will work with the public via use of all media and the Internet to have the public help locating the suspect and child. The program will be successful when all parties work together to get the word out.

There are no negative outcomes that could be determined from the implementation of this program. The issue will be to educate the public so they will help when and if the AMBER Alert is activated.

There will be a formal press release on October 24th, 2002, involving all King County law enforcement agencies. The police department will ensure that local residents are informed of the program and their role in the activation.

SUMMARY

The AMBER Alert program has been designed to save lives and it will work through the partnerships created between the community, the media and law enforcement.

RECOMMENDATION

No action is required by the Council this evening.

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