



Missing Children With Special Needs

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Missing Children Division*

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Autism



- We experience many cases of children with special needs who are reported missing to law enforcement
- The highest number of the cases appear to involve children with Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Others cases involve children with Down Syndrome, traumatic brain injury and any other conditions characterized by physical, social or cognitive impairments and communications challenges

Missing Special Needs Children

Unique challenges –

- the children have a tendency to “wander or elope”
- the children sometimes have a tendency to seek small enclosed spaces which may be overlooked during initial searches
- some of them may elude or hide from searchers
- some children have a diminished sense of fear



Challenges continued....

- They may be unable to respond to search teams
- The children can be very resilient
- Unique behaviors – *“no two children are alike”*
- The children may have very specific interests – active roadways, road signs, trains, fire trucks.
- The children often seek bodies of water



Challenges

- Some children may walk long distances – far exceeding search perimeters established by law enforcement and search teams.
- Search teams must consider innovative and creative techniques to find the children

Food

Trail Lighting

Music

Favorite Toy

Parent voice

Fire Apparatus®

Helicopter

Train

Leading Causes of Death

Missing children with autism are especially
“at risk” because of unusually high
mortality rates

Drowning – 91%*

Struck by vehicles

Exposure to the elements

Other accidental causes



*National Autism Association
Association

NCMEC Strategies

- On March 1st, 2012 NCMEC staff met with SME's to discuss the issues and identify strategies
- Representatives from National Autism Association, nationally recognized search experts, Team Adam Consultants and staff from MCD, National Safety Director, Call Center, Family Advocacy, Outreach and Training

Lost/Missing Children Strategies

- Reports of lost/missing special needs children (regardless of affliction) require elevated response
 - *must be treated critically!*
- Actions of the first responders are vital to the safe recovery of the child
- Immediate response to bodies of water in the vicinity to “*head the child off.*”
- Attempt to contain the child in a specific area.

Strategies continued....

LISTEN INTENTLY TO THE PARENTS/ CARE GIVERS –

- Get information about the behaviors of the child. Assessment of the “risk factors.”
- Find out what interests the child? – i.e. favorite places they like to go, interests in trains, heavy equipment, water, roadways
- Has the child gone missing before?

Knowing the Child Continued.....

- How will the child likely react to searchers?
- Will they hide? Will they run? Are they verbal or nonverbal? Will they respond to their name being called?
- How will they react to K-9's, ATV's, etc.
- Who will they most likely respond?
- Do they need life-sustaining medications?

Response/Search Strategies continued...

- Sustained searches –
- Development of search plan
- Incident Command System (ICS)

Must be aggressive and well coordinated

All available emergency personnel – law enforcement, fire, medical

Other jurisdictions for additional help

Trained searchers/use of volunteers

Lessons Learned

DO NOT GIVE UP UNTIL THE CHILD IS
FOUND!

*The case of 8 year old R.W. of Hanover,
Virginia demonstrates that these children
are especially resilient and can survive
many days – even in rugged terrain and
inclement weather*





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Available Resources

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Team Adam



Team Adam will deploy on cases of missing special needs children

Specialized Team Adam search personnel will also deploy to assist, when appropriate

2011 – 8 deployments, 2 recalls – children found

2012 – 12 deployments, 6 recalls – children found

2013 – 6 deployments, 1 recall – child found

Best Practices Guide – Search Protocols

- NCMEC Publication of Search Best Practices – Search Protocols –
- *“Law Enforcement Response Guide for Missing and Abducted Children”*
- Awareness and Education – First responders
- Role of Call Takers – 911 Centers – NCMEC
- Focus on prevention – parents, care givers, educators, etc.
- Parents/Caregiver considerations?

Continued....

Use of Electronic Tracking Devices – Project Lifesaver, LoJackSafetyNet.com, Caretrak, Emfinders.com



Awareness and First Responder Training

- NCMEC Staff have developed training package and delivered to first responders via webinars and classroom to over 1,000
- Law Enforcement Outreach Teams (Team Adam and Project ALERT) provided train-the-trainer instruction and training packages. 48 trainings have already been delivered in 15 States.
- Published articles in professional law enforcement magazines – newsletters

Awareness and First Responder Training

- All State Missing Child Clearinghouses
- International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) have been engaged re; training and publication
- The “National Search and Rescue Committee” are including the NCMEC protocols in their response manual (participating agencies – DOD, DHS, DOI, DOC, DOT, FCC, NASA)

A Child is Missing – Targeted Notification



- Neighborhood canvassing and rapidly alerting vital
- Automated telephone notification system notifying residents/businesses in a targeted area about a missing child



AMBER[®]
ALERT

Girl, 9, on bike seized by man

East Arlington witness
alerted by screams

BY ROBERT THARP
Fort Worth Star-Telegram

ARLINGTON — A 9-year-old Arlington girl was kidnapped yesterday afternoon as she and her younger brother rode bicycles in the parking lot of a vacant shopping center in east Arlington, police said.



Amber
Hagerman

A witness told police he looked up after hearing Amber Hagerman scream and saw a man grab her from her bicycle and push her inside a black, full-sized pickup. The man then jumped in the truck and sped out of

(More on ABDUCTION on Page 16)

Saturday The Case of Amber Hagerman January 13, 1996

3:15 pm

Child's body found in Arlington



6-month-old Amber looks at a photo album.



Amber is shown dressed for Halloween at age 2.



Amber, 6, smiles in her school picture.

Portrait of a fun-loving 9-year-old

By MARY DOOLAR

ARLINGTON — Amber Hagerman owns 26 Barbies, loves Taco Bell and vanilla ice cream and is a whiz on roller skates.

Her father describes the blue-eyed third-grader with long brown hair as "wildfire with a good sense of humor."

And her mother tenderly remembers the time that Amber put makeup on a pink stuffed rabbit.

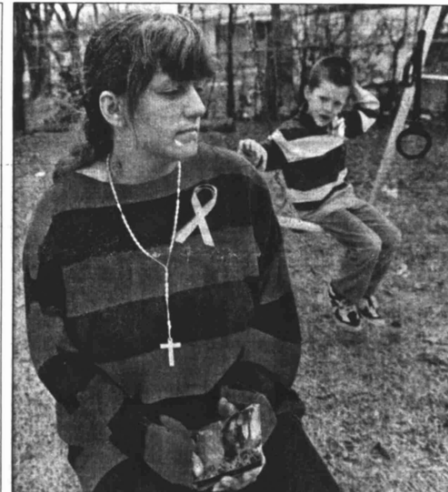
"She decided he needed lipstick — all over his face," said Donna Whitson, 28, smiling down yesterday at a snapshot of Amber and the bunny. "She loves makeup."

The nation has gotten to know Amber only as the little girl who was snatched up by a man in a black pickup while riding her bike one day.

But what is lost in the TV images and news accounts of the crime is the story of a child who likes to float on inner tubes at Joe Pool Lake, enjoys a good game of Nintendo and plays on a trampoline with her best friend.

Richard Hagerman, Amber's father, said he knew his daughter was something special when she tried to turn herself over right after

(More on AMBER on Page 16)



Donna Whitson, mother of Amber Hagerman, waits for news of her abducted daughter with her

son, Richard Chad Hagerman, in her parents' backyard in east Arlington.

Remains resemble Amber

By ROBERT THARP
AND DEANNA BOYD

ARLINGTON — The body of a small child with long dark hair was discovered in a creek bed near Texas 360 and Northeast Greens Oaks Boulevard in far north Arlington late last night.

Authorities said the body matched the description of Amber Hagerman, 9, who has been missing since Saturday. Jerry Wurst, 33, a resident of Forest Ridge Apartments, said he was standing on his second-floor balcony looking out when he heard someone yell.

Wurst said he yelled, "What's going on?" And the person replied, "There's a body in the creek."

Wurst said he then called 911. Officers said the body was naked. The body lay in a natural creek channel behind the apartment complex.

Wurst said he took a flashlight and went to the creek after he called 911. "I saw black hair," he said. "The body was real white."

The body was found at 11:41

(More on ABDUCTION on Page 15)



Amber
Hagerman

Time is the enemy

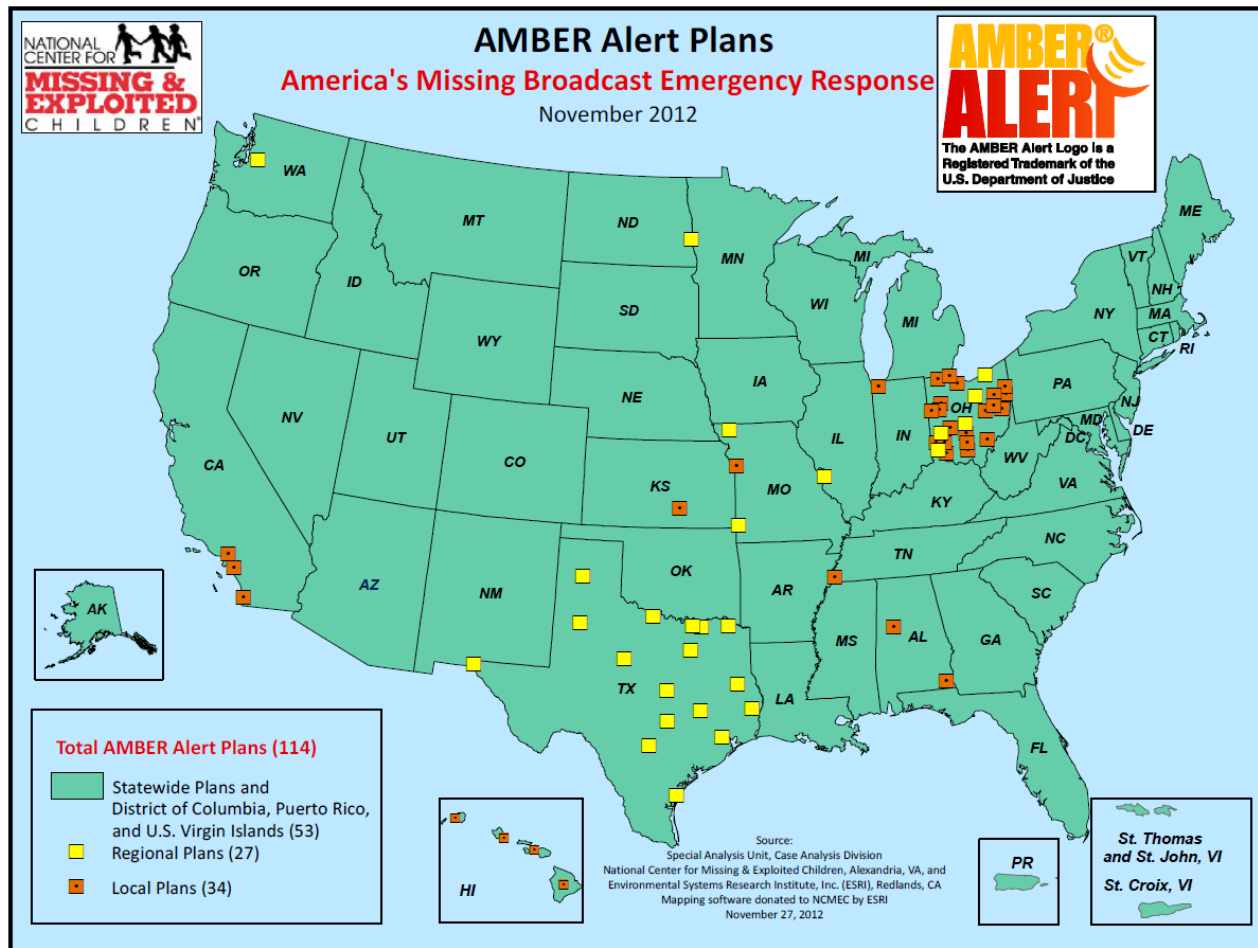
- AMBER Alert was developed after a child was abducted and quickly taken from the area in a vehicle. She was ultimately murdered.
- It is a voluntary partnership based on this case and a study conducted on abducted children who were murdered. 76% were murdered in the first 3 hours

Department of Justice

Recommended Criteria for an Amber ALERT

- There is reasonable belief by law enforcement that a child abduction has occurred.
- The law enforcement agency believes that the child is in **imminent danger of serious bodily injury or death**.
- There is **sufficient descriptive information about the victim and the abductor** for law enforcement to issue an AMBER Alert to assist in the recovery of the child.
- The abduction is of a child aged 17 years or younger.
- Amber ALERT is managed at the State and regional level

Local, Regional and State Plans

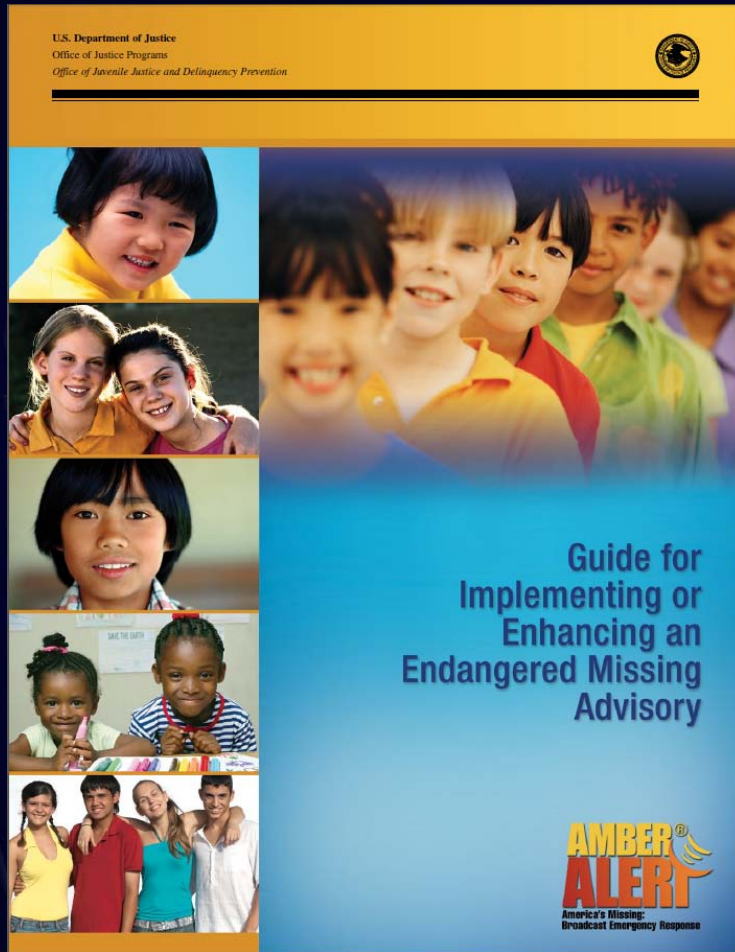


AMBER is not useful every time

- AMBER Alert is most effective when vehicle information is known.
- DOT and commercial highway digital signs, airports, hotels, business property



Law Enforcement Tools



- AMBER Alert has taught us that rapidly engaging the public is critical
- However, oversaturation erodes that assistance and support
- Matching the proper notification tool with the support needed is critical



Questions?

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