



HOUSTON REGIONAL AMBER PLAN

A cooperative public service effort
to safely recover abducted children



PUBLIC VERSION

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Statistics

Each child who is abducted is a precious life – so much more than a statistic. But these numbers help us define the scope of this terrible tragedy. The Houston Regional AMBER Plan helps turn our hopes for each child's safe recovery into a much more likely possibility.

- According to a Department of Justice study, an estimated 797,500 children were reported missing nationwide in 1999. Of those missing children, 67% were runaways, 26% were abducted by family members, 7% were abducted by acquaintances or strangers, and only 115 children or 0.01% were kidnapped for ransom.
- Another Department of Justice study estimates that annually more than 114,000 children are the victims of attempted abductions by non-family members. As many as 300 of those abducted children remain missing for long periods of time or are found murdered.
- A Washington State study found less than one-half of one percent of all murders committed nationwide in 1997 (approximately 100 cases) involved the murder of a child who had been abducted. However, 74% of the abducted children who had been murdered were killed within three hours of their abduction.
- More than 70 local law enforcement agencies are now registered to participate in the Houston Regional AMBER Plan including city police departments, county constable and sheriff's offices, school district and university police, airport and METRO transit police, and the Texas Department of Public Safety. Any law enforcement agency that's authorized to investigate the disappearance of a child can participate in the AMBER Alert program. Private security companies can register as AMBER Plan Partners but must report a missing child to the local law enforcement agency for their jurisdiction.
- Since the Houston Regional AMBER Plan began in December 2000, a total of 25 AMBER Alerts have been issued; that's an average of eight AMBER Alerts per year. The children come from all races, cities, and ages ranging from 4 days to 16 years old. A total of 22 of those 25 children (or 88%) have been recovered alive; one child was murdered, one child drowned accidentally, and one child is still missing (as of April 2004). A total of 16 suspects have been arrested, convicted, or sentenced to prison.
- Since the national AMBER Alert program began in 2001, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) reports that 93% of all missing and abducted children have been recovered. For details, visit their website: www.ncmec.org

For more information about the children abducted in the Houston region, please visit our website (www.amber-plan.net) and click on the Alert, Update, or Cancellation link by each child's name. All cases are listed chronologically with the most recent AMBER Alert at the top of the page.

Houston Regional AMBER Plan History

The first AMBER Plan was developed by the Association of Radio Managers in the Dallas / Fort Worth area after the January 1996 abduction and murder of nine-year-old Amber Hagerman of Arlington, Texas. Amber's body was recovered four days later, but her killer has still not been captured. Residents all around the Dallas metropex were devastated by Amber's death.

Radio station general managers, in cooperation with Dallas area law enforcement agencies, agreed to use their local Emergency Alert System (EAS) to broadcast AMBER Alerts concerning any future child abductions. The goal was to warn the public about an abducted child as quickly as broadcasters warn the public about severe weather or other emergencies. Eight Dallas area television stations joined the program in 1999. Over the years, the AMBER Plan has expanded to other cities and states nationwide.

In December 2000, the "Houston Regional AMBER Plan" was officially implemented after months of development by the Houston Police Department, Houston Local Emergency Communications Committee (LECC), Harris County Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and NewsRadio KTRH-AM 740, the primary Emergency Alert System (EAS) station for the 13-county Houston region of southeast Texas.

In April 2002, the Houston Regional AMBER Plan was incorporated as a non-profit organization administered by its own Board of Directors. Board members represent local broadcasters, law enforcement agencies, missing child organizations, and other AMBER Plan partners. For more information, visit: www.amber-plan.net.

In the fall of 2001, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) launched a national AMBER (America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response) campaign. For more information, visit: www.ncmec.org.

In February 2002, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) modified its rules for the Emergency Alert System to create a new "Child Abduction Emergency" event code. The new CAE code makes it easier for broadcasters to identify and re-broadcast AMBER Alert messages. For more information, visit: www.fcc.gov/eb/eas.

In August 2002, Texas Governor Rick Perry signed an Executive Order creating the Texas AMBER Alert Network administered by the Texas Department of Public Safety. For more information, visit: www.txdps.state.tx.us/dem/documents.htm#amber.

In December 2002, President George W. Bush signed an Executive Order creating a national AMBER Alert program coordinated through the Department of Justice. Thanks to broad, non-partisan congressional support, the national AMBER Alert program was codified into federal law on April 30, 2003. For more information, visit: www.ojp.usdoj.gov/amberalert/.

Houston Regional AMBER Plan

How Does It Work?

The Houston Regional AMBER Plan uses the Emergency Alert System (EAS) as the primary method to quickly disseminate AMBER Alert messages to the broadcast media and the public.

The Houston Local Emergency Communications Committee (LECC) has designated KTRH-AM 740 as the primary EAS station and KUHF-FM 88.7 as the secondary EAS station for 13 counties in the Houston region (including Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Colorado, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Liberty, Matagorda, Montgomery, San Jacinto, Waller, and Wharton counties). All other radio, TV, and cable outlets in the 13-county region are required to monitor KTRH-AM 740, KUHF-FM 88.7, and the National Weather Service for EAS messages.

Any law enforcement agency in the 13-county region that wants to participate in the Houston Regional AMBER Plan must pre-register and train two or more supervisors (usually Sergeant or higher rank). If the supervisors or their contact information changes, the law enforcement agency must submit an updated Registration Form. For the dates, times and locations of upcoming AMBER Plan training seminars, please contact our Executive Director Beth Alberts by phone or e-mail as listed on the front cover of this Plan.

How are AMBER Alerts issued? First, a law enforcement supervisor logs on to a secure AMBER Plan website to prepare an AMBER Alert message or, if the agency doesn't have Internet access, the agency can fax the AMBER Alert request to KTRH. The message explains when and where the child was last seen, and includes a description of the child, any suspect or vehicle, direction of travel, and possible destination (if known). The law enforcement supervisor calls KTRH to confirm that the AMBER Alert was received and to answer any questions. KTRH may record the interview for its news broadcasts.

The news editor at KTRH may re-write the AMBER Alert message into broadcast format for immediate release on the air. KTRH has presently offered to repeat the AMBER Alert every 15 minutes in the first hour, then every 30 minutes for the next two hours, subject to change by station management. The AMBER Alert can also be broadcast on other Clear Channel stations, such as KBME-AM 790 and KPRC-AM 950.

If the AMBER Alert is issued within three hours of the child's abduction, KTRH will broadcast its initial AMBER Alert message as a tone-alert EAS "Child Abduction Emergency". Similarly, the National Weather Service will broadcast all AMBER Alerts (regardless of the abduction timeframe) as a tone-alert EAS "Child Abduction Emergency" on NOAA Weather Radio stations located within a 200-mile radius of the child's abduction. Every radio, TV station, and cable outlet in the 13-county area is required to monitor both KTRH and the National Weather Service for EAS messages, so they can decide whether to voluntarily re-broadcast the AMBER Alert.

KTRH also uses e-mail and broadcast fax technology to distribute the written AMBER Alert script to other broadcast and print media outlets, law enforcement agencies, the National Weather Service, and AMBER Plan partners throughout the 13-county EAS area.

Because the abductor may be driving the child beyond the Houston region, the AMBER Alert script is also e-mailed to the Texas AMBER Alert Network and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, so they can also re-distribute the AMBER Alert using other appropriate methods. For example, the Texas AMBER Alert Network notifies the Texas Department of Transportation to post Alerts on dynamic message signs over state highways; the Texas Lottery Commission can add Alerts onto lottery tickets being sold at Lotto ticket outlets in the area.

Participating radio, TV and cable outlets can voluntarily interrupt their normal programming and re-broadcast the AMBER Alert transmitted by KTRH or the National Weather Service. Or they can use the AMBER Alert script e-mailed to them, so their own news anchors or air personalities can broadcast the AMBER Alert as a news bulletin or story in their next scheduled newscast. TV stations and cable outlets can run a text “crawl” of the AMBER Alert message across the TV screen without interrupting their normal programming. Each station and cable outlet decides whether to interrupt normal programming and how often to repeat the AMBER Alert.

AMBER Plan partners (such as METRO and school bus programs, taxi companies, courier and delivery services, telephone and cable repair services, shopping centers and other organizations that have a large number of customers or employees heading out on the road) can notify their employees and customers traveling in the area to look for the missing child or suspect’s vehicle.

When available, the child’s digital or print photo can be scanned by the law enforcement agency and distributed with the AMBER Alert to television, cable systems, and print media outlets. The photo can be added to flyers distributed in the neighborhood where the abduction occurred and posted at nearby shopping malls and other businesses.

The child’s photo and AMBER Alert message are posted on our website (www.amber-plan.net) for the public to view. The website includes information about the AMBER Plan, child safety tips to prevent abductions, advice to parents whose child is missing or has been abducted, and links to other missing and abducted child organization websites.

When updated information is received about the missing child or suspect, the law enforcement agency re-contacts KTRH and requests that an AMBER Update be issued. Once the child is found, the law enforcement agency notifies KTRH to broadcast an AMBER Cancellation.

An AMBER Alert message encourages the general public to look for the abducted child and to call the law enforcement agency or 9-1-1 immediately if they have any information to assist in the child’s safe recovery. Citizens should never try to stop or apprehend a suspect on their own.

The quick and repeated coverage of AMBER Alerts on multiple media outlets will not only raise public awareness about the abduction, but will encourage the suspect to immediately release the child for fear of being caught. Our goal is the safe recovery of every missing or abducted child.

Houston Regional AMBER Plan

AMBER Alert Criteria

A trained Supervisor at a participating law enforcement agency must verify five specific criteria prior to submitting a request for an AMBER Alert. The five criteria consist of:

1. The child is 17 years of age or younger (meaning the child is a minor under Texas state law.)
2. The law enforcement agency believes the child has been abducted. (This means the child was either unwillingly taken from their environment without permission from the child's parent or legal guardian, or the child has been taken by the child's parent or legal guardian who also commits an act of murder or attempted murder during the time of the abduction.)
3. The law enforcement agency believes the missing child is in immediate danger of serious bodily harm or death.
4. The law enforcement agency has conducted an investigation that has either verified the abduction or eliminated alternative explanations for the child's disappearance.
5. Sufficient information is available to disseminate to the public that could assist in locating the abducted child, suspect, or the vehicle used in the abduction.

The Texas AMBER Alert Network has adopted the same five criteria for activation. All AMBER Alerts for the Houston region are sent to the Texas AMBER Alert Network.

If all 5 criteria are met, you can request an AMBER Alert.

The following situations are examples when the AMBER Alert should be activated:

- ◆ A child is abducted off the street
- ◆ A child is unwillingly taken from his/her home
- ◆ Abductions where a child is accompanied by an adult without parental consent
- ◆ A vehicle is stolen or carjacked and a child was left inside the vehicle
- ◆ A child is missing with evidence of foul play; police believe the child was abducted

The following situations do not meet the AMBER Alert criteria:

- ◆ Missing children who have a history of running away from home
- ◆ Missing children involved in child custody disputes (parental kidnappings)
- ◆ Missing adults (18 years or older) including Alzheimer's patients
- ◆ Police searches for other criminals (murder suspects, bank robbers, etc)

The law enforcement agency may consider extenuating circumstances (such as an abduction by the child's non-custodial parent who has a history of abusing the child or has threatened to harm the child) to request an AMBER Alert. In such cases, KTRH will rely on the judgment of the law enforcement supervisor whether or not to issue an AMBER Alert.

Houston Regional AMBER Plan AMBER Alert Message Template

The law enforcement supervisor can utilize this fill-in-the-blank template to quickly prepare an AMBER Alert message. Every case is unique, so modify the template as needed to fit the facts available. Omit those sections where information isn't known.

The (name of law enforcement agency) is searching for (age) year old (name of child).
(He/she) was last seen around (time) (a.m./p.m.) (today or other date) at (location) in
(city and state). At the time, the child was (describe child's activity prior to abduction).

(Name of child) is a (age) year old (race) (male or female), about (height) tall and
(weight) pounds, with (color) hair and (color) eyes. When last seen, this child was
wearing (describe child's clothing, jacket, hat, jewelry, or other visible features).

IF AVAILABLE: A photo of the child is available at: www.amber-plan.net

The (name of law enforcement agency) believes this missing child was abducted by a
(age range) year old (race) (male or female), about (height) tall, weighing about (weight)
pounds, with (color) hair and (color) eyes. The suspect was wearing (describe suspect's
clothing, jacket, hat, jewelry, tattoos, or other visible features).

The suspect is believed to be driving a (year)(color) (make and model) (car, truck, or van)
with (state) license plate (number). This vehicle was last seen at (street and cross street)
heading (direction) on (street) toward (city or possible destination).

If you spot this suspect or missing child, or if you have any other information, contact the
(name of law enforcement agency) at (area code and phone number) or call 9-1-1.

AMBER ALERT (TRAK Sample)

Date: 04/07/2004
Case #: 1234578
Soc. Sec #: 123-45-6789
Name: Amber Smith
Address: 102 Main Street
Anytown, US 77000
Height: 4 Feet 2 Inches
Weight: 70
Age: 9
Sex: F
Eyes: Brown
Hair: Brown
Complexion: Light
Race: W
Birth Date: 02/26/95



OTHER INFORMATION BELOW

HOUSTON REGIONAL AMBER PLAN TRAK CHILD ABDUCTION NOTIFICATION

The Harris County Sheriff's Office is searching for 9-year old Amber Smith. She was last seen around 10 p.m. tonight at a convenience store at 1300 Haden Road. At the time, the child was asleep in the back seat of her mother's car when the vehicle was stolen. Amber is a 9-year old white female, about 4 feet 2 inches tall, 70 pounds, with long brown hair and brown eyes. When last seen, this child was wearing a blue and white dress, white socks, and black shoes. The Sheriff's Office believes this child was abducted by unknown suspects who are now driving the stolen car. The vehicle is a grey Chrysler PT Cruiser with Texas license plates MOM-4710. This vehicle was last seen heading east on the East Freeway (Interstate 10) toward Baytown. If you spot this vehicle or missing child, or if you have any other information, contact the Harris County Sheriff's Office at 713-967-5810 or call 9-1-1.

**HARRIS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
(713) 967-5810**

Houston Regional AMBER Plan

Media Outlet Procedures

Radio/television stations and cable systems within the 13-county Houston region are encouraged to register and participate in the Houston Regional AMBER Plan:

- KTRH-AM 740 and the National Weather Service (NWS) can activate the Emergency Alert System (EAS) to broadcast AMBER Alerts as a “Child Abduction Emergency (CAE)” event code for the county where the abduction occurred. Participating media outlets should re-broadcast the AMBER Alert if the abduction occurred (or if the abducted child was last spotted) within the station’s coverage area or cable system’s franchise area.
- Participating media outlets can program their EAS encoders/decoders to either automatic or semi-automatic mode if they want to re-broadcast the KTRH or NWS audio of the AMBER Alert immediately or the next stop-set or programming break. You do not need to use the 8-second Attention Signal or EAS tones in order to re-broadcast AMBER Alerts.
- Television stations and cable systems can display the Emergency Alert System (EAS) logo or the AMBER Alert logo as a graphic. Copies of these logos are available by calling the Houston Regional AMBER Plan (713-521-2694) or the Houston LECC (281-980-1400).
- All AMBER Alert scripts are automatically e-mailed to participating radio, television stations and cable systems, law enforcement agencies, and AMBER Plan partners. Sign up for this free service by completing the AMBER Plan Registration Form.
- Instead of re-broadcasting the audio from KTRH or NWS, media outlets can use their own on-air staff to broadcast the AMBER Alert script received by e-mail. Television stations and cable systems can convert the AMBER Alert script into a text “crawl”.
- Participating media outlets are encouraged to repeat the AMBER Alert every 15-30 minutes for the next 1-3 hours, but each station and cable outlet determines its own policy.
- As soon as a photo of the abducted child is available, it will be e-mailed as a JPEG (.JPG) file to all participating television stations and cable systems, and will be posted for downloading from the AMBER Plan public website (www.amber-plan.net)
- Participating media outlets are encouraged to add an AMBER Plan link on their websites and to mention the AMBER Plan website when broadcasting the AMBER Alert message.
- If there’s an update in the case or if the child is found, the law enforcement agency will notify KTRH to distribute an AMBER Update or Cancellation using the same EAS and e-mail system. The AMBER Cancellation should only be broadcast once; any further news coverage of the story is at the discretion of each media outlet.

Houston Regional AMBER Plan

AMBER Plan Partners

The purpose of the AMBER Plan Partners program is to obtain assistance from corporations and local businesses, government agencies, schools, associations, and community organizations that support the Houston Regional AMBER Plan in its efforts to safely recover abducted children. Visit our website (www.amber-plan.net) then click on “Sponsors & Partners” for more details.

Examples of potential AMBER Plan Partners are municipal, private, and school bus programs, taxi companies, courier and delivery services, catering and pizza delivery companies, meter readers, telephone and cable TV repair services, shopping centers, airlines, civic groups, and other organizations that can report any sighting of the suspect vehicle or missing child.

As an AMBER Plan Partner:

- You will receive e-mail notification of every AMBER Alert, Update, and Cancellation issued by KTRH-AM 740, including a photo of the abducted child as soon as it’s available.
- You can forward AMBER Alert e-mails to your employees, customers, and vendors, urging them to be “on the lookout” for the abducted child, suspect or suspect’s vehicle and report any sightings to the investigating law enforcement agency or 9-1-1.
- You can add a link from your website to the AMBER Plan website (www.amber-plan.net) so your employees, customers, and the public can view the latest AMBER Alerts, learn what to do if their child is missing, and obtain child safety tips to prevent future abductions. We can add a link on the “Sponsors and Partners” webpage to your organization’s website, too!
- You can print out AMBER Alerts or other AMBER Plan web pages for posting on employee bulletin boards, distribution to customers at cash registers or customer service counters, or display on entrance doors, store windows, and other high-visibility locations.
- You can use your company’s electronic or dynamic message signs to display AMBER Alert messages or encourage viewers to go to the AMBER Plan website for more information.
- You can offer to provide financial or promotional support, donation of in-kind services, and access to manpower, equipment, and other resources. The Houston Regional AMBER Plan is a tax-exempt, non-profit organization (Tax ID #76-0700755) under IRS Section 501 (c) (3) regulations, so all donations to the Houston Regional AMBER Plan are tax-deductible.
- Only those organizations registered and approved as AMBER Plan Partners are authorized to identify themselves as “AMBER Plan Partners” and to use the “AMBER Alert” logo in their advertising or promotional literature under guidelines approved by the Houston Regional AMBER Plan’s Board of Directors.



HOUSTON REGIONAL AMBER PLAN

REGISTRATION FORM

TYPE: Law enforcement agency Media outlet AMBER Plan Partner

Agency or company name:

Mailing address:

City:

County:

ZIP:

TRAK capability? No Yes TRAK Number: _____

Primary Contact Person:

Job Title or Rank/Unit:

Work Phone:

Work Fax:

E-mail Address:

Secondary Contact Person:

Job Title or Rank/Unit:

Work Phone:

Work Fax:

E-mail Address:

We agree to participate according to the Houston Regional AMBER Plan.

Date: _____ Signature: _____

Please fax this signed Registration Form to 713-522-7386 marked ATTN: Beth Alberts