

This past winter, the Montana Department of Transportation partnered with the Department of Justice and the Montana Broadcasters Association in establishing the AMBER Alert system in Montana.

The AMBER Alert program is a child abduction recovery plan originally started in the Dallas/Fort Worth area in 1996 after nine-year-old Amber Hagerman was abducted and murdered. In response to community concern, radio stations in that area joined with law enforcement agencies to establish a program capable of quickly distributing information about child abductions to the general public. The program was named the AMBER Plan—**A**merica's **M**issing: **B**roadcast **E**mergency **R**esponse.

When a child is abducted by a stranger, the clock starts ticking and every minute counts. Sadly, statistics show that most child victims of stranger abductions are killed within the first hours or day of being taken. That is why it is critical to have as many eyes as possible on the look out for the the child and the abductor. The AMBER Alert system plays a key role in getting details out quickly.

At the request of local law enforcement, the Department of Justice determines if a situation meets the criteria of an AMBER alert. If it does, the alert is issued and information is sent to all radio and television broadcasters via the Emergency Alert System. The alert is also sent to retailers around the state through the terminals of the Montana Lottery. Individuals can sign up at [montanaamberalert.com](http://montanaamberalert.com) to receive the alerts via e-mail.

MDT puts the information on the 511 travel information system. People calling for a road report will first hear the alert that includes information about the missing child and the abductor. The MDT website features a flashing link to active alerts, and variable message signs along the highway will display the alert. MDT is also establishing a system to spread the alert to crews working on highway projects.

The network for distributing AMBER Alerts is growing, and MDT is taking on the task of raising awareness about the program and what to do if an alert is issued. As professionals who spend a good deal of time traveling, your participation is invaluable.

When an AMBER Alert is issued, be alert to traffic. If the vehicle, abductor and/or child are seen, contact local law enforcement immediately with the sighting information.

- Take no action yourself.
- Call 911 immediately.
- Provide law enforcement with as much information as you possibly can.
- Please act quickly. Time is of the essence in recovering the child and preventing further harm.

MDT has pledged to utilize available resources to help get the word out in the event a child is abducted, but you are the vital link in helping law enforcement by reporting information to rescue the child and apprehend the perpetrator.

Eventually, we hope a well-tuned AMBER Alert program in Montana will be a deterrent to child abductors and help keep our kids safe from harm. For now, in the event of a child abduction, Montana's AMBER Alert plan can aid in the safe return of a kidnapped child.