



# Town of Lexington

## Police Department

<b>Subject:</b> <b>AMBER ALERT SYSTEM</b>	
<b>Effective Date:</b> 11-1-2011	<b>Review Date:</b> Annually
<b>By Order of:</b> Mark J. Corr, Chief of Police	

### Policy & Procedure

# 47A

Revised November 2011

## GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS AND GUIDELINES

The AMBER Alert is a critical missing child response program that utilizes the resources of law enforcement and media to notify the public as quickly as possible when children are kidnapped by predators. This program is designed to help authorities respond effectively during the first three hours of a kidnap situation, which statistics show are the most critical. The goal of the program is to increase the chances of recovering abducted and endangered children. Although the scope of the AMBER Alert varies, the criteria for activation are fairly consistent. Law enforcement activates an AMBER Alert by notifying broadcast media with relevant identifying and case information when circumstances meet the criteria.

An AMBER Alert should only be used for serious abduction cases. It should not normally be used for runaway or parental abduction cases, the two leading causes of missing children. The only cause for an alert under these circumstances would be if law enforcement believes the life of the child is in serious danger (e.g. if a parent threatened to harm the child and this information can be verified). Each case will need to be judged on an individual basis.

The plan is critical as it:

- Encourages partnership between law enforcement and media by drawing on their inherent strengths
- Is an effective “time critical” response to kidnapers who can disappear with children at the rate of a mile per minute
- Sends a powerful message to “wanna-be-kidnappers” that this is a community that cares about and protects children
- Saves lives

## PROCEDURES

### A. Activation Criteria and Guidelines

1. Although each case has its own set of circumstances, law enforcement agencies must follow the activation criteria as closely as possible:
  - a. Law enforcement officials have a **reasonable belief that an abduction has occurred.**
  - b. Law enforcement officials believe that the child is in **imminent danger of serious bodily harm or death.**
  - c. **Enough descriptive information** exists about the victim and the abductor for law enforcement to issue an AMBER Alert.
  - d. The victim of the abduction is **a child age 17 years or younger.**
  - e. The child's name and other critical data elements—including the child abduction (CA) and AMBER Alert (AA) flags—have been **entered into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC)** system.
2. If **ALL** criteria are not met, the AMBER Alert should **not** be activated.
3. Circumstances where an AMBER Alert **WOULD** be activated:
  - a. Child is abducted and there are witnesses to the crime.
  - b. Child is missing and there is evidence of foul play, and law enforcement believes the child was abducted.
  - c. A vehicle was stolen or "carjacked" and a child was left inside the vehicle.
  - d. Child is missing and particular consideration is given to the child's behavior or mental capacity, which in some way contributes to their disappearance, or the child is considered endangered.
4. Circumstances where an AMBER Alert **WOULD NOT** be activated:
  - a. Child is missing and law enforcement has no evidence of foul play.
  - b. Child runs away from home.
  - c. Child is missing as a result of a custody dispute and the child is not considered to be at risk of bodily harm or death.
  - d. An adult is missing (18 years or older).

### B. Notifications and Documentation

1. Notifications: Prior to an AMBER Alert dissemination, the Commanding Officer will notify the Chief of Police along with the Captain of Operations and the Lieutenant in charge of Detectives. If directed to do so, the Town Manager will also be notified by phone.

2. Other considerations:
  - a. The Public Information Officer (PIO) should be prepared to make statements or draft a press release.
  - b. Additional dispatchers should be hired to manage a higher volume of incoming calls.
  - c. Insure that Detectives are available for follow-up of generated leads.
3. Documentation: The investigating officer's initial report will be completed by the end of the shift. The Commanding Officer will supplement the report documenting the AMBER Alert activation and a copy of the Activation Request form should be attached to the report.

C. Activation Request Procedure

1. In situations where all three criteria have been met, the Chief or his/her designee may submit an AMBER Alert Activation Request by:
  - a. Calling the Massachusetts State Police Communications Section (Comm. Sec) at **508-820-2121** and,
  - b. Then faxing the completed Activation Request form to Communications Section at **508-820-2150**.
  - c. A copy of the form is attached to this policy and additional copies are available on the computer under the G: drive "**Amber Alert Action Form**". In most cases, the Commanding Officer should make the initial call to Communications Section. The Chief or designee should re-contact Communications Section upon successful completion of the fax to ensure that all of the information on the Activation Request was legibly transmitted.
2. **The Commanding Officer making the initial call should be prepared to furnish as much of the information shown on the form as possible. The Activation Request Forms will be kept in a folder in the Commanding Officer's room.**
3. As soon as possible, a recent photograph of the abducted child and the suspect, if available, should be obtained and forwarded to the Communications Section preferably in electronic format (especially if a scanner is available).
4. Upon receipt of the Activation Request, the Communication Section will immediately notify an on-call Major, known as the Amber Alert Activation Officer, providing him/her with the information received. The Major will then:
  - a. Verify the information by calling the requesting police agency;

- b. Determine if the information satisfies all the AMBER Alert criteria, and
- c. Either activate the alert or decline the activation request, and notify requesting agency of his/her decision.
- d. **Note:** Where a request is denied, the police are still free to contact the media directly. The media may treat it as a news item or decide on a case-by-case basis to broaden an alert. In such cases the Chief of Police and the Captain of Operations will be notified prior to any media notification.

IV. Alert Dissemination

- 1. The Massachusetts State Police Communication Section will work with the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) to disseminate a broadcast (voice and/or text) over the Emergency Broadcast Network. This involves tape recording a message and sending it to two radio stations in Boston. Other stations monitor the message and, after a series of such monitoring; stations pick it up across the state.
  - 2. Where abduction takes place near a state border, or where there is reason to believe the suspect will flee this state, consideration should be given to notifying the New England States Police Network (NESP) at 800-343-5682 so that police agencies in other states will be on the lookout for the parties.
  - 3. Stations that decide to do so will likely interrupt their regular broadcasting to air the AMBER Alert. It is expected that this will take place every 30 minutes for the first 4 hours unless the alert is terminated. Cable and other television stations that decide to participate are more likely to broadcast a text message.
- E. Termination: The State Police Communications Section should be notified immediately when an abducted child is recovered or found. The State Police Alert Activation Officer (Major) must take appropriate steps to cancel the Alert and arrange to have the broadcasters so notified. The Chief of Police and Town Manager will be notified immediately of a terminated alert.