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ROD BLAGOJEVICH - GOVERNOR

NEWS

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Blagojevich announces major success of upgraded Amber Alert system

Improvements implemented in 2003 resulted in recovery of six abducted children

SPRINGFIELD IL – Gov. Rod R. Blagojevich today released figures indicating that upgrades made to Illinois' Amber Alert program during 2003 have made a dramatic difference in the system's ability to help law enforcement quickly locate and recover missing children.

The Illinois State Police statistics indicate that the Amber Alert program was activated 15 times in Illinois in 2003. This total compares to three activations in 2002. All 15 alerts this year were resolved and the Amber Alert program is credited for recovering six of the abducted children.

“We must do everything we can to help our law enforcement officials respond quickly when a child disappears. We did that in 2003 by coordinating with the National Weather Service and our state's broadcasters. We were able to take a good program and make it even better,” Blagojevich said.

Last spring, Blagojevich announced changes in the state's AMBER Alert program, which allowed law enforcement to notify the media about a child abduction much faster than before. The original system required police to notify the news media via blast-fax. Under the improved plan, law enforcement coordinates with the National Weather Service (NWS) to use its Emergency Alerts System (EAS) – the system used to send alerts the media when hazardous weather is approaching – to notify media outlets about child abductions. As a result, the AMBER Alert is immediately transmitted to the news media, drastically reducing the response time.

Illinois State Police Director Larry Trent said, “The improvements to Illinois' child-abduction alert system are making a difference. The partnership with Illinois law enforcement, Illinois broadcasters, National Weather Service and others has made our communities more responsive and aware of children in dangerous situations.”

Parents should still follow these tips to help their children stay safe:

- Children should know their full name, home phone number and how to use the telephone.

- Choose babysitters with care. Obtain references from family, friends, and neighbors. Once you have chosen a caregiver, drop in unexpectedly to see how your children are doing. Ask your children about their experience with the caregiver, and listen carefully to their responses.
- Interact regularly with your neighbors. Tell your children whose homes they are allowed to visit.
- Don't drop your children off alone at malls, movie theaters, video arcades, or parks.
- Teach your children that adults should not approach children for help or directions. Tell your children that if they are approached by an adult, they should stay alert because this may be a trick.
- Never leave children unattended in an automobile. Children should never hitchhike or approach a car when they don't know and trust the driver.
- Children should never go anywhere with anyone without getting your permission first.

Blagojevich reminded the public that if they have a tip on the whereabouts of a child, adult or vehicle that is the subject of an Amber Alert, they should immediately call 9-1-1 or the telephone number given in the Amber Alert and provide authorities with as much information as possible.