



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH - GOVERNOR

NEWS

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Gov. Blagojevich announces that Illinois will join several states in marking January 13 as AMBER Alert Awareness Day

AMBER Alert Task Force launches Poster Contest

SPRINGFIELD – Governor Rod R. Blagojevich announced today that Illinois is joining with several states across the nation to recognize January 13 as AMBER Alert Awareness Day. The day marks the 11th anniversary of the abduction and brutal murder of Amber Hagerman, who was kidnapped while riding her bicycle in Arlington, Texas. As a tribute to her, the AMBER Alert System began in 1997 and today is in place in all 50 states to help find abducted children.

“Over the years we’ve seen that the AMBER Alert System is a critical tool in recovering children from danger,” said Gov. Blagojevich. “By working with communities and schools throughout the state, and joining other states in these efforts, we can help increase awareness about the dangers of child abduction and further protect our children.”

To mark the anniversary in Illinois, a poster contest for grades K-12 is being sponsored by the Illinois AMBER Alert Task Force. The contest begins on Jan. 13 (AMBER Alert Awareness Day) and will conclude on May 25 (Missing Children’s Day). This year’s poster theme is “Bringing Our Missing Children Home,” with a fifth-grade winner’s entry being submitted in the National Missing Children’s Day Poster Contest. The competition will also provide teachers with an additional resource to teach students about safety issues. Information relating to the contest can be found on the Illinois AMBER Alert Task Force website, www.amberillinois.org.

Gov. Blagojevich created the Illinois AMBER Task Force in April 2003. At that time, Illinois was one of only two states in the nation to create a partnership with the National Weather Service and the Broadcasters Association. Through the partnership, the Illinois State Police has been able to send information on abducted children to radio and television outlets throughout the state for immediate broadcast.

“The response to a tragedy 11 years ago has become one of law enforcement’s most valuable tools when a child has been abducted,” said Illinois State Police Director Larry G. Trent. “The concept has grown from media alerts, to highway message boards, and most recently, to text

messages on cell phones. The number of children recovered through the use of the AMBER Alert is remarkable. Today, as we honor the memory of Amber Hagerman, we reinforce our commitment of protecting all children.”

The Illinois AMBER Alert Notification Plan is a voluntary partnership between law-enforcement agencies, broadcasters, and the National Weather Service designed to assist children under the age of 16 who have been abducted and are at risk. It does not apply to missing children in general and specific criteria must be met for activation by the local police agency. There must be enough information available about the kidnapper or the child, such as appearance or vehicle description which could potentially lead to apprehension of the suspect and recovery of the child.

“As first responders, Illinois’ broadcasters welcome their critical role as members of the AMBER Alert team and applaud the professionalism of the rest of the team represented by the Illinois State Police and the National Weather Service,” remarked Dennis Lyle, President and CEO of the Illinois Broadcasters Association. “Clearly, every AMBER Alert activation in Illinois illustrates the importance and effectiveness of local broadcasters and the Illinois Emergency Alert System.”

The Governor’s announcement will help educate the general public about AMBER Alert. AMBER stands for **A**merica’s **M**issing: **B**roadcast **E**mergency **R**esponse. It is a tool used by law enforcement, in combination with other means, to bring about the safe return of an abducted child. The goal of the AMBER Alert is to instantly notify an entire community to assist in the search for and safe return of the child. According to the U. S. Department of Justice, the AMBER Alert system is a proven success and has helped rescue more than 308 children nationwide.

“What’s great about the AMBER alert system is that through coordination of existing resources we are able to make a difference,” said IDOT Secretary Timothy W. Martin. “We have our changeable message boards in place to assist travelers, but through coordination with our AMBER partners, we are able to turn them into a valuable tool to assist law enforcement in a moment.”

In the event a child, adult, or vehicle fitting the AMBER Alert description is spotted, immediately call the telephone number given in the AMBER Alert and provide authorities with as much information as possible.

For additional information on AMBER, visit the Department of Justice website:

www.ojp.usdoj.gov/amberalert/home.html