

**MARIN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
GENERAL ORDER**

**CHAPTER 5 - OPERATIONS
GO-05-19
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DATE: 4-14-11

AMBER ALERT SYSTEM AND ENDANGERED MISSING ADVISORIES

POLICY

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for promptly requesting an AMBER Alert activation when a confirmed child abduction has occurred and the victim of that abduction is seventeen (17) years of age or younger and (s)he is believed to be in danger of serious bodily harm or death.

DEFINITIONS

AMBER ALERT is a program that partners California's law enforcement community, media broadcasting agencies, and the public in locating abducted children. In addition to several other alerting / notification systems, California's Emergency Alert System (EAS) is used to broadcast necessary and pertinent information about confirmed child abductions when the AMBER Alert system is activated.

CONFIRMED means having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abducted. Confirmation can be established either through eyewitness accounts or by eliminating other likely and reasonable possibilities.

ENDANGERED MISSING ADVISORY (EMA) is a program involving the same alerting / notification measures utilized during an AMBER Alert, except there is no activation of the Emergency Alert System.

PROCEDURE

Deputies dispatched to a reported child abduction shall respond in an expeditious manner and follow the investigative steps outlined in the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Child Abduction Response Plan, as required by General Order 05-18.

Immediate preliminary investigative actions should include efforts to exclude the possibility that the child is missing of their own accord and is not the victim of an actual abduction. Consideration should be given to:

1. Whether there is a witness to, or physical evidence of, an actual abduction
2. The age of the child
3. Whether the child has been missing before
 - a. were prior missing reports the result of running away
 - b. where was the child found
 - c. are the circumstances different this time
4. The length of time the child has been missing
5. The actions and/or behaviors of the child prior to their disappearance
 - a. was the child despondent
 - b. is the child experiencing academic or personal problems
6. Is there evidence of on-line enticement
 - a. blogs
 - b. Instant messaging

- c. text messaging
 - d. cell phone calls
7. Is the child's cell phone still in use

Deputies should endeavor to conduct preliminary interviews with the person making the report and the child's parents, care givers, friends, and/or school staff, as appropriate. An initial search of the area the child was last seen in is also critical and time sensitive.

If the deputy reasonably believes an abduction has occurred, a supervisor shall be dispatched to the scene to help coordinate all on-going investigative actions. Notification shall also be made to the Investigations Division as soon as practical.

If the missing child is seventeen years of age or younger, if there is information available that, if disseminated to the general public, could assist in the safe recovery of the victim, and if the abducted child is reasonably believed to be in danger of serious bodily harm or death, serious consideration should be given to requesting an activation of the AMBER Alert system. Amber Alert activations are requested through the Sheriff's Office Communications Center. Having a suspect vehicle description or license plate available is NOT a requirement to activate an AMBER Alert.

All Sheriff's Office requests for an AMBER Alert shall first be approved by a Sheriff's Lieutenant or higher authority.

If it is determined the child's abduction was committed by a family member, deputies should determine if the family member has harmed the child in the past, or is currently threatening to do so. Familial abductions qualify for an AMBER Alert if the child is endangered by the actions of the abducting family member. Threats or use of violence while taking the child and/or a history of abuse against the child, a spouse, or partner should be considered in determining whether the abducted child is in danger of serious bodily harm or death.

When a missing child is endangered, but the case does not meet the criteria for an AMBER Alert activation, the case may still qualify for an Endangered Missing Advisory (EMA). An EMA involves many of the same alerting / notification measures utilized during an AMBER Alert, but an EMA does not activate the Emergency Alert System, and Cal Trans' Changeable Message Signs are typically not utilized either. Similar to an AMBER Alert, EMA's are also requested through the Sheriff's Office Communications Center.

Examples of missing person reports that do not meet the criteria for an AMBER Alert activation, but do qualify for an EMA include:

1. A custodial parent who takes their child, and due to specific circumstances, the investigating deputy deems the child to be at risk or endangered
2. A juvenile is who reported missing, but there is no indication or confirmation that an abduction occurred.
3. A person with a known medical condition, such as dementia, is reported missing

All Sheriff's Office requests for an EMA shall first be approved by a Sheriff's Sergeant or higher authority.

RELATED STANDARDS

Government Code Section 8594
General Order 05-18

AFFECTED DIVISIONS:

Patrol

Communications

REVISIONS

None

By order of:

Robert T. Doyle
SHERIFF - CORONER