

Dept. of Justice: Celebrates 20 year anniversary of the AMBER Alert program

Posted on Tuesday, May 23, 2023

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MADISON, Wis. – The Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ) today, in advance of National Missing Children’s Day on Thursday, May 25, 2023, is recognizing the 20-year anniversary of the implementation of the AMBER Alert program in Wisconsin. AMBER Alert programs were put in place across the United States after Amber Hagerman, 9, of Arlington, Texas, was abducted and murdered near her home in 1996. The AMBER Alert program is in memory of Amber Hagerman, however, the AMBER in the alert name stands for America’s Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response.

“For two decades, the AMBER Alert program has been an important part of the Wisconsin Department of Justice’s work to keep kids in Wisconsin safe,” said Attorney General Josh Kaul. “In collaboration with partners around the state, we are committed to building upon the successes of this program in the years ahead.”

Since Wisconsin implemented its AMBER Alert program in 2003, there have been 57 AMBER Alert activations. In over 50% of the cases, the AMBER Alert broadcast itself played a role in the recovery of the child(ren). Wisconsin established the following criteria for its AMBER Alert program based off guidance from the PROTECT Act:

1. Child must be 17 years of age or younger.
2. Child must be in danger of serious bodily harm or death.
3. Initiating agency must have enough descriptive information about the child, the suspect, and/or the suspect vehicle to believe an immediate broadcast alert will help locate the child.

Whether an AMBER Alert is approved or denied, Wisconsin DOJ offers a Child Abduction Response Team (CART) to assist the investigating law enforcement agency. The CART is comprised of special agents, prosecutors and analysts to assist the investigating agency. In the case of a missing child(ren), local law enforcement can issue a Missing Endangered Person Alert through the Wisconsin Crime Alert Network. This can be done whether or not an AMBER Alert is being requested.

Wisconsin's AMBER Alert program has grown and evolved over the past two decades, starting with faxes and phone calls whenever an alert was issued, to today's Wireless Emergency Alerts, the Emergency Alert System on television and radio, social media posts, Wisconsin Department of Transportation Dynamic Messaging Signs, digital billboard displays, displays by Wisconsin Lottery retailers, and broadcasts by news outlets across the state. Advances in the dissemination of AMBER Alerts have been crucial as law enforcement work to find missing children. Wisconsin DOJ continues to seek the most up-to-date and best technology to ensure everything possible is done when a child goes missing.

Below you'll find helpful links related to missing persons programs and social media channels in Wisconsin.

AMBER Alert Website: <https://amberalert.widoj.gov/>

Missing Persons Clearinghouse:

<https://www.missingpersons.doj.wi.gov/wisconsin-missing-persons>

Wisconsin Crime Alert Network: <https://wisconsincrimealert.widoj.gov/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/WIMissingPerson>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/WIMissingPersons>

Silver Alert Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/WiSilverAlert>

Silver Alert Twitter: <https://twitter.com/WiSilverAlert>