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| <br><b>Cambridge<br/>Police Department</b> | <b>POLICY &amp; PROCEDURES</b>   |   | <b>No. 521</b>                      |
|   | Subject/Title:<br><b>AMBER Alert Activation</b>  |   |                                     |
|   | Issuing Authority:<br><br>Robert C. Haas<br>Police Commissioner | Review Date:<br><b>March 5, 2012</b>    | Issue Date:<br><b>July 16, 2012</b> |
|   |  | Effective Date:<br><b>July 30, 2012</b> | Rescinds:<br><b>Policy #2003-5</b>  |
| References/ Attachments:<br><b>Massachusetts Child AMBER Alert Plan</b>   | Accreditation Standards:<br><b>41.2.6 (d)</b>  |   |                                     |

## I. PURPOSE:

The purpose of this set of guidelines is to describe the criteria required for initiating an AMBER Alert, as well as describe the following:

- The responsibilities of the officers responding to a report of a missing, endangered, or abducted child in terms of obtaining information in determining the appropriateness of initiating an AMBER Alert;
- The notification protocols when a situation may warrant the initiation of an AMBER Alert;
- The responsibilities of the Commanding Officers evaluating and making the determination as to the appropriateness of initiating an AMBER Alert;
- The role of the Emergency Communications Center (ECC) as it relates the initiation of an AMBER Alert; and
- The follow on action to be taken once an AMBER Alert has been initiated.

## II. POLICY:

It is the policy of the Cambridge Police Department to carefully evaluate every reported case of a missing, endangered, or abducted child for the appropriateness of the initiation of an AMBER Alert. Further, the department will adhere to the criteria that has been established for the issuance of an AMBER Alert.

**III. CRITERIA FOR ISSUING AN AMBER ALERT:<sup>1</sup>**

There are three criteria that must be met before the Massachusetts State Police will activate the AMBER Alert plan, and those criteria are as follows:

1. A child, 17 years of age or younger, has been abducted;
2. The child is in danger of serious bodily harm, injury, or death; and
3. There is enough descriptive information to believe an AMBER Alert may help locate the child.<sup>2</sup>

**IV. DEFINITIONS:**

- A. AMBER Alert:** (*America’s Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response*) – A voluntary, cooperative effort involving the Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association, State Police, MEMA, and local broadcasters. Radio, cable and television stations statewide will receive a child abduction alert message and may broadcast it every thirty minutes for up to four hours to solicit the public’s assistance in recovering an abducted child and quickly apprehending the suspect.
- B. Child:** For purposes of this directive, a “child” is defined as an individual who is 17 years of age or younger.
- C. Descriptive Information:** There are certain circumstances under which the AMBER Alert would be activated, which would include, but not necessarily limited to the following:
  1. Child is abducted and there are witnesses to the crime.
  2. Child is missing but there is evidence of foul play, and law enforcement believes the child was abducted.

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<sup>1</sup> Criteria for issuing an AMBER Alert transcribed verbatim from the Official Website of the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS).

<sup>2</sup> CALEA Std. **42.1.6 (d)** – *The agency has a written directive concerning missing children, including runaway, abandonment, abducted, or other missing status, that includes the following:*

- a. *a policy statement concerning missing or unidentified children;*
- b. *criteria for supervisory notification;*
- c. *information required for immediate notification of appropriate inter- and intra-agency coordination;*
- d. ***criteria for activation of AMBER Alert Systems or other public notification;***
- e. *responsibilities of call takers, first responders, supervisors, and investigators; and*
- f. *follow-up responsibilities.*

3. Vehicle was stolen or “carjacked” and a child was left inside the vehicle.
4. Child is missing and particular consideration is given to his/her behavior or mental capacity which in some way contributed to his/her disappearance. The child is also considered endangered.

## V. GENERAL GUIDLEINES & CONSIDERATIONS:<sup>3</sup>

The **Massachusetts Child AMBER Alert** is an emergency alert system that helps recover abducted children. Named after Amber Hagerman, who was abducted and murdered in 1996, the Plan utilizes the Emergency Alert System (EAS) to interrupt regular programming and broadcast information that could help locate the child. Information is also broadcast on electronic signs along highways and in airports. In January of 2002, the State Police identified the need for establishing an AMBER Alert program in Massachusetts. As a result of meetings between the State Police, Massachusetts Police Chiefs and Massachusetts media outlets, there was unanimous support for the program.

On October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2002, several months prior to the announcement of the national mandate, the Massachusetts Child AMBER Alert became effective in Massachusetts; a period of just nine months from initial consideration to full implementation. This process took over two years to come to fruition in other states. The Massachusetts State Police were also instrumental in the development of a regional AMBER Alert program.

Due to the relatively small geographic size of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and its close proximity to the other New England states, persons involved in abductions can quickly travel from one state to another. As a result, partnerships have been developed with each of the New England states, and other Northeastern states, to allow for the AMBER Alert to be broadcast in multiple states when necessary.

This set of guidelines serves as a companion policy to the ***Policy #520 – Missing & Unidentified Children***, which provides much greater detail with respect to children who may go missing for a variety of reasons, or where an officer encounters a child who is unidentified or lost. This set of guidelines is designed to provide greater detail with respect to the reporting and investigation of those cases when an officer believes that the AMBER Alert System should be activated for the purposes of locating a child who may have been abducted and/or whose disappearance may have placed the child in immediate danger. The very nature of these cases relies upon an officer’s ability to quickly assess the circumstances under which a child may have gone missing, and when appropriate,

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<sup>3</sup> AMBER Alert Overview is transcribed verbatim from the Official Website of the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS).

determine the eligibility for a regional broadcast to the general public which may be useful in quickly locating the missing child.

**VI. PROCEDURES:**

**A. Initial Response & Investigation:** Whenever an officer is assigned to investigate a report of a missing or lost child, as part of that officer's initial investigative approach, he/she should determine the circumstances under which the child went missing. Often in the case of abduction or when a child's safety or wellbeing is possibly endangered, time is of the essence in terms of quickly locating the child and returning that child safely. As soon as the investigative officer believes there may be sufficient circumstances that meet the criteria for an AMBER Alert, the officer should do the following:

1. Verify witness observations to the abduction;
2. Verify with the witness the actual time of the child's abduction;
3. Rule out the possibilities of the following:
  - a. No evidence of foul play was involved;
  - b. The child is missing as a result of running away from home, and there is no indication of immediate danger to the child's welfare;
  - c. The 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. The missing person is not an adult (over the age of 17 years of age).
3. Ascertain as much descriptive information as possible relative to the circumstances under which the abduction took place, to include:
  - a. Obtaining a full description of the child believed to have been abducted, to include a full clothing description, and if possible, a current picture of the child.
  - b. Obtaining a full description of the suspect.
  - c. A description as to the direction of flight, and any vehicle information that might be available.
  - d. Any other relative information that would be helpful as part of an AMBER Alert broadcast.

4. Notify the Sector Sergeant of the circumstances of the abduction and/or possible endangerment of a child, and the officer's belief of that the criteria meets an AMBER Alert. Under these circumstances, the Sector Sergeant should:
  - a. Respond immediately to the scene.
  - b. Ensure that an initial broadcast is made to other police units through the ECC, to include a possible broadcast over BAPER.N.
  - c. Ensure that the Shift Commander is aware of the potential of the possibility of an AMBER Alert being issued.
  - d. Determine what other resources will be needed to assist the investigating officer, to include additional investigative personnel.
5. During the course of the investigation, and in consultation with the investigating officer and the on-scene supervisory officer, the Shift Commander should make the determination if the situation under investigation warrants (meets the criteria – refer to Section III of this directive) for an AMBER Alert.
6. The investigating officer will incorporate all the information obtained during the course of the investigation into an investigative report. If an AMBER Alert Activation request form is submitted, the completed form will be made part of the report (refer to attached report form).

**B. Activation of an AMBER Alert:**<sup>4</sup> Once the Shift Commander has made a determination that the circumstances involved with the missing child meets the criteria set forth for an AMBER Alert, the Shift Commander will ensure that the following steps have been carried out:

1. The Shift Commander will notify the duty Commanding Officer or the Duty Chief in the absence of a Commanding Officer (refer to *Policy #105 – Duty Chief Responsibilities*), who in turn will make the appropriate notifications (also refer to the *Policy #300 – Media Guidelines/Public Notification*).

**NOTE:** Regardless of whether the situation meets the criteria for an AMBER Alert activation, any abduction of a child will require the Shift Commander to initiate a notification to the duty Commanding Officer or in his/her absence notification to the Duty Chief.

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<sup>4</sup>CALEA Std. 42.1.6 (d)

2. If time permits, an AMBER Alert activation request form (see attached form) should be completed prior to making the request for AMBER Alert activation. A current photograph of the child, suspect, and/or suspect vehicle should be provided if available, preferably in electronic format.
  3. The request shall be made either:
    - a. Orally by telephone by calling the State Police Communications Section by calling (508) 820-2121; or
    - b. By faxing a completed AMBER Alert activation request to (508) 820-2150. If the AMBER Alert activation request form is faxed to the State Police, the Shift Commander should confirm the receipt of the faxed material.
  4. The Shift Commander must notify the ECC Supervisor that a request has been submitted to the State Police for an AMBER Alert Activation, and provide a copy of the material that was submitted to the State Police, in the event that calls begin coming into the ECC.
    - a. It is then the responsibility of the ECC to pass along any and all information that is received in response to the AMBER Alert activation.
    - b. The Shift Commander will also confer with the ECC Supervisor to determine what other alert broadcasts will be made with respect to updated BAPERN broadcasts, notification to other police agencies that may be involved, and CJIS alerts to be sent out.
  5. As part of the State Police protocol, the request for AMBER Alert activation will be screened by the Massachusetts State Police AMBER Alert Activation Officer, who in turn may then contact the Shift Commander to confirm the information contained within the request. The Shift Commander should be prepared to confirm the information with the State Police AMBER Alert Activation Officer, and provide any additional information that may have been obtained in the meantime.
- C. Termination of an AMBER Alert:** Once the child has been located or there is other information is received that no longer makes the AMBER Alert relevant or meets the activation criteria, the officer coming into possession of the information will immediately notify the Shift Commander. It will then become the responsibility of the Shift Commander to carry out the following notification steps:
1. Notify the duty Commanding Officer of in his/her absence the Duty Chief, who will make the appropriate notifications.

2. Notify the State Police Communication Section.
3. Notify the ECC Supervisor of the cancellation of the AMBER Alert, and then work out the other appropriate notifications (BAPERN, CJIS, area police units, and so on).
4. The fact that the AMBER Alert was cancelled will be incorporated into a supplemental report.