



Corporate Report

NO: R122

COUNCIL DATE: June 9, 2003

REGULAR

TO: Mayor & Council DATE: June 5, 2003
FROM: City Solicitor FILE: 0250-03
SUBJECT: Child Abduction Alert Program (Amber Alert)

RECOMMENDATION

That Council adopt the following resolution for consideration by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities:

WHEREAS Amber Alert is a United States program named in honour of Amber Hagerman of Arlington, Texas who was abducted and murdered by her abductor.

AND WHEREAS because of this tragedy a program was initiated by police in partnership with emergency broadcast facilities and the media to provide details of serious child abductions to the public and to find the child within the first three hours of the offence being committed.

AND WHEREAS since the inception of this program in the United States there have been 80 activations nationally with 45 positive recoveries.

THEREFORE be it resolved that the Federation of Canadian Municipalities support the creation of a Canadian nationwide Amber Alert service and petition the federal Solicitor General to implement such a program in coordination with his/her provincial counterparts, the RCMP, and Provincial and local police forces across Canada.

BACKGROUND

Amber Alert is an American program named in honour of Amber Hagerman of Arlington, Texas who was abducted and murdered by her abductor. As a result of this incident, a program was initiated by the police in partnership with the broadcast media to provide details of serious child abductions to the public to try and find the child within the first three hours of the offence being committed. The program was named in honour of Amber Hagerman, thus "Amber Alert".

The criteria of the program is very defined and has to fall within specific guidelines otherwise it loses its intended impact. In the United States the broadcast is made over the Emergency Broadcast System every 15 minutes for two hours. Then the frequency diminishes for each hour after that for a total of six hours. After then, it becomes a news item rather than an alert.

The program is for confirmed serious child abductions where it is believed the child is in danger. The age bracket (presently under 12 years) is under review. Exceptions to the plan may include children with mental/physical disabilities. The program does not include runaways or parental abductions.

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DISCUSSION

In British Columbia a committee has to be formed composed of the RCMP, all lower mainland police forces, E COMM, Child Find BC and representatives from all types of media to discuss protocols for implementing an Amber Alert program in British Columbia. Also being discussed is how such a system could be activated. It is proposed that activation will occur when:

1. The victim is under the age of 18.
2. Police have reasonable grounds to believe that the victim has been abducted.
3. Police have reasonable grounds to believe that the victim is in imminent danger.
4. Police have obtained enough descriptive information about the victim, abductor or an involved vehicle to believe that dissemination to the public could help locate the victim.
5. Police believe that the alert can be issued in a time frame that would provide a reasonable expectation that the child could be returned or the abductor could be apprehended.

CONCLUSION

A great deal of work remains to be done across Canada by all levels of government, their emergency services and the media to set up an effective Amber Alert program. Coordination and leadership must come from both the federal and provincial levels. There also needs to be further research on how to best implement this program. In a recent abduction in Toronto, that unfortunately resulted in a tragic death, it took the Toronto Police Department 13 hours to activate their system. An inquiry is now underway to determine how the system can be improved.

Craig MacFarlane
City Solicitor

c.c. City Manager

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