

DOCKET FILE COPY ORIGINAL
Before the

Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554

RECEIVED

JUN 11 2001

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

In the Matter of
Amendment of Part 11 of the Commission's Rules
Regarding the Emergency Alert System

)
)
)
) EB Docket No. 01-
66 /
) RM-9156
) RM-9215

To: The Commission.

**COMMENTS OF GREATER METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON AREA
AMBER PLAN**

Greater Metropolitan Washington Area AMBER Plan hereinafter ("DC AMBER Taskforce") hereby comments on the Commission's notice of proposed rulemaking *Amendment of Part 11 of the Commission's Rules Regarding the Emergency Alert System*. Specifically, DC AMBER Taskforce supports the addition of an event code to the Emergency Alert System to provide initial emergency notification and information pertaining to the abduction of a child. DC AMBER Taskforce believes, however, that the addition of an "Abducted Child Statement," versus the proposed "Missing Child Statement," would better serve the public and ensures the integrity of the EAS. In support of its position, DC AMBER Taskforce shows the following:

DC AMBER Taskforce Is An Interested Party

Greater Metropolitan Washington Area AMBER Plan was established for the metropolitan Washington, DC area in order to provide law enforcement officers an

No. of Copies rec'd 0413
List A B C D E

additional tool for responding to recent child abductions. This metropolitan area consists of more than four million people residing in the District of Columbia, Northern Virginia and parts of Maryland. DC AMBER Taskforce will launch the AMBER Plan in July 2001. The DC AMBER Task Force includes the Child Exploitation Subcommittee of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' Police Chiefs Committee, local broadcasters, key leaders in the community, and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

Thirty-two law enforcement agencies within the metropolitan area have approved the establishment of an AMBER Plan. Each agency is affiliated with the MWCOG, which has created a child abduction alert system for the AMBER Plan in conjunction with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

WMAL and WTOP, the two primary Emergency Alert System radio stations in the metropolitan Washington, DC area, have been actively involved in implementing the AMBER Plan. Additionally, two Fairfax, Virginia community activists were instrumental in the development of the DC AMBER Plan and will act as the community liaisons for the AMBER Plan.

The Emergency Alert System Is Vital To The Success Of The Amber Plan

The Emergency Alert System ("EAS") has been used nationwide as a means of disseminating AMBER Alerts. It is an important vehicle for getting these urgent bulletins into the hands of broadcasters and then into the community quickly and simultaneously. The EAS is only used for first-time notification of a child's case to broadcasters and the public. Benefits to using the EAS include:

- Every radio/TV/cable system will receive the information at the same time.
- Stations can drop the expense of phone lines dedicated to AMBER faxes.
- Stations have the option of re-transmitting the audio that is received when EAS is activated, or information can be re-voiced by station personnel.
- With current weekly EAS tests, control room operators are already aware of the system, and use it regularly.

The DC AMBER Taskforce has developed child abduction alert system criteria specific to our local needs. Specifically, a child must be 14 years of age or younger, or 15 - 17 years if no indication exists to support that the child's own behavior or mental capacity in some way contributed to the criminal activity. In addition, law enforcement must conclude that the child is in imminent danger of physical harm.

Once the criteria have been met, an alert can be activated by the law enforcement agencies. The investigating agency will notify the EAS broadcast stations by fax of the alert. The alert will be confirmed by telephone. Then the EAS stations will transmit the urgent bulletin to the participating broadcast stations via the EAS and via e-mail.

The Significance Of An "Abducted Child Statement"

The DC AMBER Taskforce supports the addition of an "Abducted Child Statement" versus the "Missing Child Statement" proposed in the Amendment to Part 11 of the Commissioner's Rules. The "Abducted Child Statement" is more efficient and accurately depicts the circumstance for which the AMBER Plan was created. The AMBER Plan is activated in response to an abducted child rather than a missing child. The AMBER Plan is not used for runaway cases or most parental abductions unless the life of the child is in grave danger. This is to prevent overuse of the alert. The DC

AMBER Taskforce believes that a “Missing Child Statement” may be an abuse of the EAS, may not ensure integrity for which the EAS was created, may discourage broadcasters from volunteering, and does not reflect the intent of the DC AMBER Plan.

The U.S. Department of Justice reports that annually there are as many as 450,700 children who run away from home and 354,000 children abducted by family members. In comparison, there are 4,600 abductions by non-family members reported to police annually and 300 of those children are gone for long periods of time or murdered.

The Amber Plan Is A Cooperative Effort In Saving Lives

In February 2000, two community activists, Abigail and Stephen Shannon, brought forth the idea of launching a regional AMBER Plan, with the backing of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, to the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, which demonstrated an immediate interest in this regional effort. The Chiefs of Police formally adopted the proposal for a regional AMBER Plan in May 2000.

In June 2000, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children began a year-long project of developing a template to be used by governments nationwide, that may be interested in developing local, regional, or statewide AMBER Plans. The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments jointly agreed with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children to have the local AMBER Plan serve as the pilot program.

Local radio and television stations were first contacted in August 2000 to gauge partnership interest. In January 2001, WMAL and WTOP, the primary EAS stations for

the Washington, DC area, stated their willingness to work with the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in launching the Plan. Broadcasters from cities and towns throughout the region have shown great interest in the plan, and look forward to joining with the efforts put forth by the primary EAS stations -- WMAL and WTOP.

There has been a great willingness and enthusiasm on the part of the law enforcement officials and the community liaisons in creating and implementing the AMBER Plan. Monthly meetings have been held. Some broadcasters did show reluctance at first, *e.g.*, how often the Plan would be used. However, broadcasters discovered that participating in such a plan concentrates on child abduction, the AMBER Plan does not carry an expense, and is a great tool to serve the community.

All parties involved are extremely excited for the July 2001 launch of the DC AMBER Plan and are in the process of putting on the final touches - assigning a "point of contact" within each police department who signs off on all AMBER Alerts, and establishing station guidelines for identifying the criteria and issuing an AMBER Alert.

Conclusion

Greater Metropolitan Washington Area AMBER Plan respectfully requests that the Commission take into consideration the comments of the DC AMBER Taskforce and the important role the AMBER Plan plays throughout our country in saving the lives of children. For the foregoing reasons, DC AMBER Taskforce respectfully requests that the Commission rules be amended to include a "Child Abduction Statement" event code to the Emergency Alert System.

Respectfully submitted,

Greater Metropolitan Washington Area AMBER Plan

By: Abigail Shannon

Abigail Shannon and Stephen Shannon
9349 Deer Glen Court
Fairfax, VA 22041
703-359-4347

Dated: June 11, 2001

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Abigail Shannon, hereby certify that on this eleventh day of June, 2001, I caused **Greater Metropolitan Washington Area AMBER Plan** comments to the Commission's notice of proposed rulemaking *Amendment of Part 11 of the Commission's Rules Regarding the Emergency Alert System* to be filed with the Commission by placing an original and fourteen copies in the United States mail, first class, postage prepaid to the following:

Commission's Secretary
Magalie Roman Salas
Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Room TW-A325
Washington, D.C. 20554

Abigail Shannon
(Signature of Person Preparing

Documents)

Please distribute original and 14 copies as follows:

original and four copies (required for each filing)
five additional copies (to be distributed to Commissioners)
two additional copies (RM-9156)
two additional copies (RM-9215)
one receipt copy (please return in self-addressed postage prepaid envelope)