

## Public Alerts

### 333.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for alerting the public to important information and soliciting public aid when appropriate.

### 333.2 POLICY

Public alerts may be employed using the Emergency Alert System (EAS), local radio, television and press organizations and other groups to notify the public of incidents, or enlist the aid of the public, when the exchange of information may enhance the safety of the community. Various types of alerts may be available based upon each situation and the alert system's individual criteria.

### 333.3 RESPONSIBILITIES

#### 333.3.1 EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES

Employees of the Vancouver Police Department should immediately notify their supervisor or Shift Sergeant upon learning of a situation where public notification, a warning or enlisting the help of the media and public could assist in locating a missing person, apprehending a dangerous person or gathering information.

#### 333.3.2 SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

A supervisor apprised of the need for a public alert is responsible to make the appropriate notifications based upon the circumstances of each situation. The supervisor shall promptly notify the appropriate Precinct or Division Commander and the Public Information Coordinator (PIC) when any public alert is generated.

The supervisor in charge of the investigation to which the alert relates is responsible for the following:

- (a) Updating alerts
- (b) Canceling alerts
- (c) Ensuring all appropriate reports are completed
- (d) Preparing an after-action evaluation of the investigation to be forwarded to the appropriate unit Commander.

#### 333.3.3 PUBLIC ALERT REPORTING OFFICER RESPONSIBILITIES

The Chief of Police should designate a Public Alert Reporting Officer, who is responsible for:

- (a) Remaining familiar with the protocols for activating, maintaining and cancelling all applicable public alerts.
- (b) Being the point of contact with the Washington AMBER Alert Advisory Committee.

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- (c) Staying current with any changes to the alert entry process through the committee and via [www.wsp.gov.wa/crime/mpu.htm](http://www.wsp.gov.wa/crime/mpu.htm).
- (d) Ensuring all Department members are made aware of any changes in the public alert system.

### **333.4 WASHINGTON STATEWIDE AMBER ALERT™ PLAN**

The AMBER Alert™ Plan is a voluntary partnership between law enforcement, state government agencies, broadcasters and other participants to rapidly disseminate information to enhance the public's ability to assist in recovering abducted children (RCW 13.60.010).

The Vancouver Police Department participates in this partnership and may initiate an AMBER Alert to disseminate information to the public when the criteria for an AMBER Alert are met.

#### **333.4.1 ALERT CRITERIA**

The following criteria must exist prior to requesting an AMBER Alert:

- (a) The child is under 18 years of age and is known to have been abducted. The child is not a runaway or an abandoned child.
- (b) The abducted child is believed to be in danger of death or serious bodily injury.
- (c) The AMBER Alert activation should occur within four hours of the qualifying event unless circumstances or the timeliness of the information warrant otherwise.
- (d) There must be enough descriptive information to believe that an AMBER Alert activation will assist in the recovery of the child, including:
  - 1. Where the abduction took place.
  - 2. A physical description of the child: height, weight, age, hair color and length, eye color, clothing worn when the child was last seen, and any distinguishing physical characteristics.
  - 3. A physical description of the abductor: height, weight, age, hair color and length, eye color, clothing worn when the suspect last seen, and any distinguishing physical characteristics.
  - 4. Place last seen.
  - 5. Description of the vehicle: color, make, model, license number, approximate year.
- (e) The incident must be reported to and investigated by a law enforcement agency.

#### **333.4.2 PROCEDURE**

Should the Shift Sergeant or supervisor determine that the incident meets the criteria of the Washington Statewide AMBER Alert Plan, the Shift Sergeant or supervisor should:

- (a) Ensure that Department protocol is followed regarding approval of the alert.

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- (b) Ensure all appropriate documentation is completed.
- (c) Contact the Clark Regional Emergency Service Agency (CRESA) advising of the need to active an AMBER Alert.
- (d) CRESA will relay the information on to the Washington State Patrol (WSP) Communication Center for entry into the Law Enforcement Alerting Portal (LEAP).

### 333.4.3 INITIAL NOTIFICATIONS

Upon initiation of an AMBER Alert, the Shift Sergeant or supervisor shall:

- (a) Ensure the Records Division promptly enters the information into the Washington Crime Information Center (WACIC) and National Crime Information Center (NCIC) databases.
- (b) Promptly notify the appropriate Precinct or Division Commander of any AMBER Alert activation.
- (c) Ensure the preparation of an initial press release that includes all the information required by the Washington Statewide AMBER Alert Plan, and any other available information that might aid in locating the child, such as:
  - 1. A photograph.
  - 2. Detail regarding location of incident, direction of travel, potential destinations, etc., if known.
  - 3. Name and telephone number of the PIC or other authorized point of contact to handle media and law enforcement liaison.
  - 4. A telephone number and point of contact for the public to call with leads or information.

### 333.4.4 POST-INCIDENT REPORTING

The Chief of Police or authorized designee shall be responsible for submitting the AMBER Alert Report to the Washington State Police Chiefs (WASPC) in a timely fashion. The Chief of Police or the authorized designee shall be responsible for representing the Department during the AMBER Alert Review Committee's after-action review of the alert.

### 333.5 ENDANGERED MISSING PERSON ADVISORY

The Endangered Missing Person Advisory is a voluntary partnership between law enforcement, other government agencies and local broadcasters to rapidly disseminate information to law enforcement agencies, the media and the public about a missing and endangered person in circumstances that do not qualify for an AMBER Alert (RCW 13.60.050).

The Vancouver Police Department participates in this partnership and may initiate the required notifications whenever a person is reported missing from this jurisdiction and meets the criteria of

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an Endangered Missing Person. An endangered missing person advisory may be termed a "silver alert" when initiated to assist in the recovery of a missing endangered person age 60 or older.

#### 333.5.1 ADVISORY CRITERIA

All of the following criteria must exist prior to initiating an Endangered Missing Person Advisory:

- (a) The person is missing under unexplained, involuntary or suspicious circumstances.
- (b) The person has a developmental disability, is a vulnerable adult or is believed to be in danger because of age, health, mental or physical disability, in combination with environmental or weather conditions, or is believed to be unable to return to safety without assistance (RCW 13.60.010).
- (c) There is enough information that could assist the public in the safe recovery of the missing person (e.g., photo or description, clothing worn when last seen, vehicle, location last seen).
- (d) The incident has been reported to and investigated by a law enforcement agency.

#### 333.5.2 PROCEDURE

Should the Shift Sergeant or supervisor determine that the incident meets the criteria of an Endangered Missing Person Advisory, the Shift Sergeant or supervisor should:

- (a) Ensure that Department protocol is followed regarding approval of the alert.
- (b) Ensure all appropriate documentation is completed.
- (c) Ensure CRESA contacts the WSP Communication Center for entry into LEAP.
- (d) Ensure Records Division personnel enter the information into the WACIC and NCIC databases using the proper message key: Missing (MNP), Endangered (EME), or Involuntary (EMI).
- (e) Notify Dispatch of the advisory and ensure that it is prepared to handle a high volume of telephone calls.
- (f) Ensure that the handling officer attempts to obtain a photograph of the missing person and/or suspect as soon as possible.
- (g) Ensure the Records Division enters the photograph into WACIC and NCIC, then send an email to the WSP Missing Persons Unit (MPU).
- (h) Appoint the PIC to handle the media.
  - 1. The PIC should notify the media through appropriate channels regarding the Endangered Person Advisory. Upon request, the WSP MPU can provide electronic posters with details of the missing person.
  - 2. If the Endangered Missing Person is 21 years of age or younger, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Center (NCMEC) should be notified as soon as practicable.

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- (i) The Records Division personnel should promptly cancel the advisory after an Endangered Missing Person is located by sending an administrative message through A Central Computerized Enforcement Service System (ACCESS), noting that the person has been found.

### **333.6 BLUE ALERTS**

The Blue Alert system is a voluntary cooperation between law enforcement, state government agencies and local broadcasters to enhance the public's ability to assist in locating and apprehending persons suspected of killing or seriously injuring a law enforcement officer (RCW 10.108.030).

The Vancouver Police Department participates in this partnership and may initiate a Blue Alert to disseminate information to the public when the criteria for a Blue Alert are met.

#### **333.6.1 CRITERIA**

All of the following criteria are required to exist prior to initiating a Blue Alert (RCW 10.108.030):

- (a) The suspect has not been apprehended.
- (b) The suspect poses a serious threat to the public.
- (c) Sufficient information is available to disseminate to the public to assist in locating and apprehending the suspect.
- (d) The release of the information will not compromise the investigation.
- (e) The release of the information will not improperly notify an officer's next of kin.

#### **333.6.2 PROCEDURE**

Should the Shift Sergeant or supervisor determine that the incident meets the criteria of a Blue Alert, the Shift Sergeant or supervisor should:

- (a) Direct Records Division personnel to prepare a Blue Alert administrative message through ACCESS. The words "Blue Alert Advisory" should be included in the title of the message.
- (b) Have CRESA contact WSP Communications to verify that the advisory was received and, if available, provide the suspect's vehicle information and request the Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to activate variable message signs.
- (c) Ensure that descriptive information about the suspect, the suspect's whereabouts and the suspect's method of escape is disseminated.
- (d) Appoint the PIC to issue press releases and handle media inquiries.
  - 1. The PIC should be updated continually and be in constant contact with all media outlets to obtain maximum media exposure, provide updates and cancel the Blue Alert when appropriate.

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- (e) Confirm that Dispatch is aware of the Blue Alert and ensure that it is prepared to handle a high volume of telephone calls.
- (f) Ensure that a press release is issued cancelling the Blue Alert.

### **333.7 OTHER RESOURCE CONSIDERATIONS**

The Shift Sergeant or supervisor should consider the following resources, as appropriate:

- (a) Local allied law enforcement agency resources
- (b) FBI local office
- (c) The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)
  - 1. Monitor the Cyber Tipline® link and post missing children alerts
- (d) The National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
  - 1. Will relay AMBER Alerts over Weather Radio