

# KLAAS ACTION REVIEW

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MARC KLAAS FOUNDATION FOR CHILDREN

## A MESSAGE FROM MARC

KLAAS  
FOUNDATION  
FOR CHILDREN

**T**he KlaasKids Foundation has followed and promoted the Amber Alert since its 1996 inception as this now familiar and obvious solution might very well have saved the life of my daughter, Polly Klaas.

Our active participation in the Amber Alert includes a 1999 KlaasKids Foundation town hall meeting in Battle Creek, Michigan, that inspired community activist Robin Trumbull to pursue her vision of a statewide Amber Alert. We encouraged and offered financial assistance enabling Ms. Trumbull to unveil the Michigan State Amber Alert in 2000. Also in 2000, the KlaasKids Foundation brought the Amber Alert to the attention of the California Department of Justice and helped formulate pilot programs in Southern and Northern California.

BeyondMissing, Inc., a federally funded 501(c)(3) nonprofit with close ties to the KlaasKids Foundation, has designed and developed an easily mastered, comprehensive, and automatic Amber Alert application that is already being utilized in Texas and under serious consideration in many more states. Please check it out by logging onto our website ([www.beyondmissing.com](http://www.beyondmissing.com); select Amber Alert and go to Example one-Four Corners or Example two-Dover, Delaware). We appreciate your feedback and suggestions.

On March 3, 2003, a Texas

Amber Alert, using BeyondMissing's Amber Alert application, was activated on behalf of 14-year-old Zambra Villareal. Within 90 minutes of activation:

- 8,700 English and Spanish flyers were distributed within a 400-mile radius of Magnolia, Texas;
- Distribution included parts of five states;
- Recipients included law enforcement agencies, media assignment desks, highway motels, fast food outlets (including McDonald's), service stations, and convenience stores;
- Verizon and SBC field representatives were notified via cell phone text messages.

As America moves inexorably toward a National Amber Alert, we must be vigilant and ensure that the best and most reasonable resources are allocated toward this project. To that end, the KlaasKids Foundation has posted a comparative analysis of Amber Alerts throughout the United States on our website ([www.klaaskids.org/pg-amberplan.htm](http://www.klaaskids.org/pg-amberplan.htm)). We would appreciate your assistance in maintaining the integrity of the information posted for public and private benefit. Please forward any updated information regarding current or proposed Amber Alert applications to [klaaskids@pacbell.net](mailto:klaaskids@pacbell.net).

We are working very hard to increase our speed, streamline our process, and enlarge our list of partners throughout the United States. ■

## MONITORING THE NEW AMBER ALERT SYSTEM

**D**o you know:

- Which state activated an Amber Alert that turned out to be a hoax during the month of March?
- Which state activated an Amber Alert that turned out to be a false alarm during the month of March?
- Which state credits the Amber Alert with returning 29 out of 29 children?

An integral component of any program, particularly one as highly anticipated as the National Amber Alert, is the ability to monitor progress and evaluate success and functionality.

With 88 (34 local, 15 regional and 39 statewide) operational Amber Alerts throughout the United States, monitoring and evaluations become formidable tasks. Simple questions, such as those posed above, become problematic if one is dependent upon the phone-tree formula for answers.

America's understaffed law enforcement community will be hard-pressed to add duties as diminished resources are stretched thinner during upcoming budget crunches. Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect law enforcement to prepare, collate, and analyze detailed reports at the conclusion of individual Amber Alerts. In order to be effective, evaluations will need to be made by outside interested parties, and they will have to be done in a manner that reflects the relative values of individual incidents.

Amber Alerts that involve and include states not operating under MOUs or letters of intent may avoid evaluation because of jurisdictional issues. Since Amber Alerts are to be used only in cases that fulfill strict criteria, failure to properly evaluate individual incidents will skew and

misrepresent evaluation results.

As Amber Alerts are implemented in more and more communities throughout America, we are seeing uneven application of the program. In order to avoid mistakes or missteps that have already occurred, it is incumbent that existing programs be monitored using a standard process and that relevant information is made available to all other agencies so that errors will not be duplicated. This is the only way that the Amber Alert program will be able to build strength, confidence, and viability.

The website [www.beyondmissing.com](http://www.beyondmissing.com) offers an automated, computerized, database-rich Amber Alert application. As such, reports and evaluations can be generated based on a wide range of categories. Since data manipulation is instantaneous, the necessity for follow-up studies is avoided, problems are easily corrected, the integrity of the system is protected, and children's lives are saved.

The answers to the above?

1. 3/17/03: New Jersey's third Amber Alert ended when police determined the reported abduction was a hoax.

2. 3/03/03: Zambra Villareal was reported kidnapped from her home in Magnolia, Texas. Information placed a known associate with the girl, thereby canceling the Alert.

3. The State of California has seen every child returned whose disappearance was announced via the Amber Alert. ■

## THE AMBER ALERT TECHNOLOGY

**E**ver since Dick Tracy first spoke through his telephone wristwatch in 1946, entertainment media has provided law enforcement with ever more sophisticated and dazzling communication tools. Unfortunately, when Polly Klaas was kidnapped in 1993, two deputies had Polly's killer in their grasp within an hour, yet they were unaware that a crime had been committed. Although communications between law enforcement agencies has improved in recent years, there is still a long, long way to go before America's law enforcement community can state with confidence that reality has achieved a level of competence that approaches the vision of fiction.

If an Amber Alert is activated in Dover, Delaware the kidnapper and victim can be in Pennsylvania, New York, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, or North Carolina within three hours by simply obeying the speed limit. What network has been established that ensures comprehensive distribution of relevant text and high-resolution graphic information?

A National Amber Alert network based on Internet technology is the only solution that provides all these features. The Internet readily accepts hardware upgrades and software upgrades are minimized, making it cost-effective. The transmission and

*(continued on page 3)*

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## ADDRESSING THE ISSUES OF AMBER ALERT

In anticipation of the implementation of the new National Amber Alert, it is important to discuss the various aspects of the Amber Alert network, including the communication platforms upon which the Amber Alert depends. The technologies underlying the Amber Alert system include the Emergency Alert System (EAS), daisy chain phone trees, and fax transmission.

Launched in 1997 to replace the old Emergency Broadcast System, the EAS enables guaranteed communications in times of emergency. However, state and local officials most often use it as a warning system for regional or local emergencies. Over-involved in multiple levels of governmental codes and regulations, the EAS requires expensive encoding and decoding equipment and weekly FCC testing. Critics contend that the EAS is a deeply flawed, expensive system rendered obsolete in an era of instant communications.

Amber Alerts were created as a way for local law enforcement to quickly notify media assignment desks about predatory child kidnappings. In many states, the EAS overrides that ability by bumping Amber Alert activation upstairs to another level of authority prior to activation. This extra layer of authorization takes time, creates ambiguity, and undermines the authority of law enforcement.

Daisy Chain phone trees are even more problematic, especially on the East Coast where states are in close proximity to each other. For instance, a child kidnapped in Dover, Delaware, at 8:00 a.m. can easily be secreted in any one of about eight states by 10:00 a.m. There is not a phone tree in existence, even accounting for MOUs and letters of

intent that can compete with or overcome the stealth of a determined predator. Clearly, a more efficient, dependable, and automated system is required if the Amber Alert is to be truly effective.

There are three main problems with fax communication: slow transmission speed; grayscale vs. black and white; and access to a viable fax database. Amber Alert faxes emanating from a single source need to dial, often re-dial, and then transmit their message slowly and expensively. Depending on the number of transmissions required, this process could consume much valuable time, be expensive and deliver a degraded product with severely diminished graphic quality. In order to be an effective Amber Alert communication tool, fax machines need the ability to broadcast (batch) faxes, the ability to deliver reproducible graphics, and pre-populated databases and automatic dialing capability. Anything less is too little and obviously too late.

Clearly, a National Amber Alert Network requires cutting-edge, not cut-throat, technologies if it is to succeed. The only reason to activate the EAS is because it is a universally applied communications platform, yet it is a ponderous and expensive anachronism from the 1950s that does little to enhance the overall Amber Alert structure. Daisy Chain phone trees, while somewhat effective, can never keep pace with a predator determined to avoid detection. While it is an important step in the right direction, facsimile technology is most effective if multiple pre-populated numbers can be dialed simultaneously, and if it overcomes graphic transmission problems.

Is the Amber Alert system worthwhile, given these problems? Indeed it is: When a national or regional alert works, it can be completely successful. For example, at 8:30 p.m. on March 27, 2003, five-year-old Jon C. Martinez was reported missing to local law enforcement. Within 38 minutes, the [www.beyondmissing.com/Texas](http://www.beyondmissing.com/Texas) Amber Alert activation system faxed 9,154 English and Spanish translation flyers. Recipients included law enforcement, media assignment desks; motels; gas stations; convenience stores; and fast food outlets. Additional distribution included 2,700 emails, plus text messages to all Verizon and SBC field representatives. Thanks to this broad-based publicity, Jon C. Martinez is now back home with his family. ■

### AMBER TECH (CONT.)

retrieval of high resolution graphic and text information is instantaneous and inexpensive. The need for on-site computer hardware repair is eliminated, and the Internet provides a foundational platform to integrate future applications. A password-protected, highly encrypted Website provides the same set of powerful Internet tools to Mayberry as to LAPD or NYPD.

Such technology is the only way to blanket America with seamless and targeted Amber Alert zones that disregard state borders, focus on logical population centers and extend from the Golden Gate Bridge to the Statue of Liberty and from Galveston, Texas to Bangor, Maine. The only thing separating you from any law enforcement agency in America is a few keystrokes! For more information, visit the website at: [www.beyondmissing.com](http://www.beyondmissing.com). ■

# JOIN THE FOUNDATION AND HELP FIGHT CRIME!

To join the KlaasKids Foundation, please fill out this form and return it to the address below. Your tax-deductible membership costs just \$15.00 per year, and includes an electronic subscription to the *Klaas Action Review*, with news and information, practical tips, events, and more.

Members may also receive:

- Information on starting a National Community Empowerment program.
- Safety information for your children.
- Information about how to support legislation against crime in your state.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

As a personal gift, you will also receive the Children's Identification Packet and a beautiful "Polly, We Love You" pin, in memory of our inspiration, Polly Klaas.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed please find my tax-deductible donation of \$\_\_\_\_\_.

Discover Card       Visa       MasterCard

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*Be sure to check out our website at [www.klaaskids.org](http://www.klaaskids.org) for regular updates and information on child safety. Give us your feedback!*



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P. O. Box 925  
SAUSALITO, CA 94966

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