

Column from Sen. Matt Bartle for
Week of Aug. 29, 2005

MOBILIZING COMMUNITIES: AMBER ALERTS ON YOUR CELL PHONE

A frantic call is made to 911. A child has been kidnapped from a local shopping mall. The information is verified and within minutes tens of thousands of cell phones begin to ring all over Jackson County as a text message with the description of the suspect is relayed and an army of searchers is immediately mobilized. Within an hour the child is safely recovered and the criminal is in custody, awaiting a long sentence in a Missouri State prison.

Is this scenario the result of millions of dollars in state funding for thousands of new police officers? No. The scenario described above is well within the realm of possibility and can be accomplished without a tax increase or hiring new officers. It could become a reality simply by letting folks know of a new program where they can enlist in an effort to aid law enforcement in protecting our kids from violent felons.

Most of us are familiar with the Amber Alert system where authorities quickly notify the public when a child is abducted. A new program expands the Amber Alert system in a revolutionary and dramatic way. By simply going online and putting in your contact information, you can sign up to have Amber Alerts automatically sent to your cell phone via text message. The alert can also be sent to your e-mail address.

A frequent theme of this column has been to keep you updated on efforts in Jefferson City to protect our kids from the scourge of sexual abuse and while I believe that government has an important role to play in this effort to protect kids, I am a firm believer that government cannot do it all. In fact, most of the good things in our world are not the result of actions by politicians but are the result of actions by people. The American people and the people of this state are a reservoir of good will, faith and charity towards their fellow man. That fact is being demonstrated a thousand times over each day in places like New Orleans and the storm ravaged coast of Mississippi.

Just as people are rushing to help fill the gaps in broken levees and are offering a helping hand to their neighbors in the hurricane zone, I believe the people of Jackson County are also anxious to lend a hand locally to protect our kids. If you would like to join in the effort to lend thousands of extra sets of eyes and ears to our law enforcement agencies please go to www.amberalert.com and sign up. It is free and you will perform an invaluable service to your community.

Speaking of using cell phones to aid law enforcement, let me briefly mention one other idea that makes a lot of sense in an age of terrorism and when auto accidents and natural disasters can happen without notice. An innovative idea called “ICE” is catching on. ICE stands for “in case of emergency.” It simply involves programming in your cell phone’s address book the contact information for the person you’d want emergency workers to contact in case of emergency. Just make the entry under “ICE” and it could help an officer or EMT find your loved ones quickly in case you’re not able to give them the information yourself.

If you have comments or questions about this week’s column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278.

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