

RECEIVING AMBER ALERTS ON YOUR CELL PHONE

Where do cell phone AMBER Alerts come from?

The AMBER Alert program is an initiative of the U.S. Department of Justice. All AMBER Alerts originate with law enforcement. Once issued, the alerts are distributed by broadcasters and through Department of Transportation highway signs. They are also sent to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) to be re-distributed to a network of secondary distributors that includes Internet service providers, digital billboards, truckers, and others.

AMBER Alerts are distributed to cell phones as part of this secondary distribution through the Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) program. That program is operated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and also includes National Weather Service, Presidential and Imminent Threat Alerts. People with WEA enabled devices will receive the alerts when they are in the geographic area where an alert has been issued. When an AMBER Alert is activated in Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Department of Justice, Division of Criminal Investigation notifies Dane County Public Safety Communication Center who then sends the alert to NCMEC for secondary distribution, which includes WEA.

The Old System

Prior to 2013, the public could receive AMBER Alerts on their mobile devices by signing up to participate in the Wireless AMBER Alert Program. This was an SMS text-based system, where members of the public were required to sign up online and designate the areas they wanted to receive alerts for. This system has now been retired in favor of the WEA program, also known as the Commercial Mobile Alert System (CMAS).

The New System

If you own a CMAS/WEA-capable mobile device, it will automatically receive AMBER Alerts, National Weather Service, Imminent Threat, and Presidential Alerts. Unlike the previous system, there is no need to opt in or change any settings to receive the alerts. Another advantage of CMAS/WEA is that it delivers alerts only for the area in which you are currently physically located. So when you travel away from home, you will receive alerts for the city you are visiting but not for your home city. CMAS/WEA alerts are sent on a special wireless carrier channel called Cell Broadcast, and are thus not affected by congestion on the voice or SMS text channels. The alerts are transmitted simultaneously to all mobile devices within range of the cellular carrier towers in the affected area. The system does not need to know your mobile number and it does not track your whereabouts; it simply "broadcasts" out the alert and any mobile devices that can hear the alert will display it to the user. CMAS/WEA alerts have a very distinct alert tone and vibration, so you will know when you hear and feel this unique warning that it is a CMAS/WEA message.

How do I know if my cell phone can get the new alerts?

Only mobile devices that are CMAS/WEA-capable will receive these new alerts. To determine if your mobile device is CMAS/WEA-capable, visit this webpage: www.ctia.org/wea. In the left-hand column on that page, click on the link for your wireless carrier. On that resulting page on the carrier's site, most carriers show a list of which mobile devices will receive CMAS/WEA alerts on their network. If your wireless device is not on the list, you can visit www.missingkids.com/ambersignup to find additional ways to receive the AMBER Alerts.

Also, be sure to ask for a CMAS/WEA-capable device the next time you acquire a new mobile device. Look for this symbol on the box:



Will I be charged to receive Wireless Emergency Alerts?

No, the alerts are **FREE** of cost for all subscribers.

Do I have to sign up to receive AMBER Alerts?

If you have a [WEA-enabled phone](#), you are automatically enrolled for the three alerts: President, Imminent Threat and AMBER Alerts.

Can I opt-out of AMBER Alerts?

Consumers may opt out of Imminent Threat and AMBER alerts. Per the WARN Act of 1996, Congress said that no consumer could opt out of Presidential Alerts.

The directions for opting out of Imminent Threat and AMBER alerts vary by device and provider. Please contact your wireless service provider for instructions.

If chose to opt-out of AMBER Alerts, but now want to sign up for them again. How do I sign up?

The directions for opting out of Imminent Threat and AMBER alerts vary by device and provider. Per the WARN Act of 1996, Congress said that no consumer could opt out of Presidential Alerts.

The directions for opting in to the Imminent Threat and AMBER alerts vary by device and provider. Please contact your wireless service provider for instructions.