

CHILD RESCUE ALERT

PROTOCOL

Introduction

Child Rescue Alert ("CRA") is a voluntary protocol between the police service and media organisations to seek assistance from the public where there are reasonable grounds to believe a child has been abducted and will be seriously harmed. The CRA alerts the public about the abducted child through media outlets.

The use of a CRA is solely to preserve a child's life by finding the whereabouts of the child believed to have been abducted.

A CRA recognises the unique nature of child abduction and the importance of locating the child as soon as possible. The CRA is not to be used for any other purpose.

Activating a Child Rescue Alert

The Police:

The following four criteria must all be met before a CRA can be issued to the media:

- 1. The child is apparently under 18 years old;**
- 2. There is reasonable evidence that the child has been kidnapped or abducted;**
- 3. There is reasonable belief that the child is in imminent danger of serious harm or death;**
- 4. There is sufficient information available to enable the public to assist police in locating the child.**

A CRA should not be implemented for incidents that do not fulfil all these criteria – for example, where a child is missing but there is no evidence of kidnap or abduction.

The authorisation to implement a CRA must be given by a Senior Police Officer, at a level no less than the Senior Investigative Officer or Police Superintendent.

The Senior Police Officer will determine the regional scope of the CRA. The CRA will be on a regional level, not a national level.

Once the Senior Police Officer is satisfied the criteria has been met, the Police Force (“the Force”) seeking the CRA will directly contact:

- the appropriate regional newsroom in the case of television;
- the appropriate local radio stations in the case of radio ;
- the appropriate regional newspapers in the case of newspaper publishers.

The point of contact in the media organisation would normally be the newsdesk.

The Force will provide the media organisation with written details of the CRA.

Example of information to be forwarded to the media:

"6 year old boy abducted from Oxford Bus Station at 1.45pm today. He is described as wearing a Leicester City football top with ginger hair.

The offender forced him into a white transit van, with ladders on the roof. He has long greasy hair, aged 40-45 with dark clothing

Any information – please call Thames Valley Police 0123 456789”

The Force will, wherever possible, nominate a press officer who would be expected to deal solely with queries concerning the CRA and would be the single point of contact. Media issues not relating to the CRA should normally be dealt with by a different person.

The press officer dealing with the CRA will contact each media organisation to confirm receipt of the CRA and will provide updates and further information about the status of the alert as soon as possible.

Notification of cancellation of the alert will be provided by the same process used for launching the alert, i.e. By the press officer contacting the newsroom. Notification of the cancellation of the alert will be completed as soon as it is practical to do so.

Each Force will nominate a point of contact for general/ ongoing issues concerning CRA's in their area. Each Force will check its procedures at 6 monthly intervals and the system tested annually.

The overall point of contact for media policy issues about the protocol is the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Press Office.

Issues relating to a specific incident should be addressed to the investigating force's Senior Press Office involved in the investigation

The media

It is recognised that time is of the essence to broadcast/ publish the CRA once it is received.

On receipt of a CRA:

In the case of the broadcast media, the broadcaster will use best endeavours to broadcast the CRA as soon as possible at appropriate intervals until notified by Force to cancel the CRA.

The print media will use best endeavours to publish the CRA in relevant editions of newspapers and on their websites

The final decision to broadcast/ publish is a matter for the broadcaster/ publisher. This decision to broadcast/ publish may depend on factors such as the nature of the audience and technical and editorial considerations.

The final wording on what is broadcast/ published and when it is broadcast/ published is in the editorial control of the broadcaster/ publisher

Media organisations will make suitable arrangements to co-operate with annual testing of the procedures and provide appropriate training to their staff about the CRA Protocol.

General

The Protocol will be reviewed after two CRA launches or following its first year in existence, whichever is the earlier and thereafter at appropriate times.

July 2006