

**Premier Gordon Campbell
Launch of the B.C. Amber Alert Program
May 25, 2004**

Check Against Delivery

It is a pleasure to be here today with so many representatives from law enforcement and also people in the community who have been so actively involved in protecting our children and building a society that's as safe and secure for young people as possible.

I'm pleased to be joined by my Solicitor General, Rich Coleman, who has worked very hard with the community, with police and also with a number of MLAs on this project.

Ken Johnston is here today from Vancouver-Fraserview. He served with Barry Penner from Chilliwack-Kent and with Dennis MacKay from Bulkley Valley-Stikine on an MLA committee to assist the Solicitor General. I'm glad they've been able to join us. Dave Hayer is here from Surrey-Tynehead. Lorne Mayencourt is here from Vancouver-Burrard and Rob Nijjar is here from Vancouver-Kingsway. They reflect the commitment that we have as a government to our young people. The active support that they've given the Solicitor General has been truly significant.

The Solicitor General is also joined by the Minister of Children and Family Development, Christy Clark. I want to say thanks to all of you for coming and being part of this announcement.

I'd also like to thank the chief of the Vancouver police department, the head of the RCMP in British Columbia and Debie Bly from Child Find BC for joining us in this very important announcement.

Today is national Missing Children's Day. It's hard to believe, but every year over 66,000 children go missing in Canada. Close to 20,000 of those children are from British Columbia – that's one in every 100 B.C. children.

Thankfully, about 90 per cent of all missing children in Canada are located again. But every time a child goes missing, a parent's heart stops beating. I just can't imagine the trauma and the agonizing uncertainty that they go through. But there are people here and across B.C. who know too well how that feels.

Children are our most precious resource, and we must do everything we can in our power to protect them. That's why I am pleased to announce today that Amber Alert is now in place in B.C. to help keep our children safe.

Amber Alert is used in most other Canadian provinces and throughout the United States, where it has been credited with locating 134 children. The B.C. program builds on the lessons and experiences from those other programs across the continent.

In January, the Amber Alert Society of B.C. was established with the help of a \$20,000 grant from the Ministry of Public Safety and the Solicitor General. The society was created to oversee Amber Alert's program in British Columbia and it's a great example of the community working in partnership. It involves the RCMP and municipal police forces, federal government agencies, emergency response agencies, Child Find BC, B.C. Children's Foundation and the B.C. broadcast media.

Amber Alert is not a suitable tool for every missing child case. But it will be used in cases where the welfare of a child is suspected to be in danger. When an Amber Alert is issued, law enforcement agencies will use e-mail, fax and the Internet to provide instant and up-to-date information to police, media and the public. It will take advantage of advanced communication systems like PRIME and ECOM. Reports will be broadcast on radio and TV, requesting anyone with information to call 911. Digital highway signs will display information requesting driver vigilance on the road. Information may include vehicle descriptions or even licence plate numbers, and each one of you, every British Columbian, will play a critical role in the success of this program. Together we will create an instant provincewide network serving as law enforcement's eyes and ears in British Columbia. Together we will extend the search efforts through every region of this province. You'll provide an abducted child with a voice and give parents hope.

Two resources have already been developed to help us all understand Amber Alert and to ensure its success: first, a 'how to' handbook for law enforcement agencies, the media and the business community; and second, a public information website that's going online today at www.bcambertalert.ca.

In a perfect world, programs like Amber Alert would not be necessary. But in today's world Amber Alert will be an invaluable tool in locating missing children and reuniting them safely with their families.

I want to thank all the people who've been involved in developing our Amber Alert program in British Columbia, and I want to thank the public in advance for their vigilance and for their help. Together we will work to protect our children. Together we will work to create a safe environment for all of them. And together I believe that we can give young people that go missing and their families the support they deserve as we create a safer community for all of us.

Thank you very much.