

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-106670](#), a report to congressional addressees

## Why GAO Did This Study

AMBER Alerts quickly communicate information to the public in certain child abduction cases. DOJ oversees the AMBER Alert network, which is made up of law enforcement and other involved stakeholders. DOJ created the AMBER Alert program to help carry out its AMBER Alert responsibilities.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (2021 NDAA) required DOJ to take additional actions related to the AMBER Alert network. It also includes a provision for GAO to assess the extent to which DOJ implemented these requirements and identify any challenges or needs in the U.S. territories.

This report addresses (1) U.S. territories' processes for and challenges in responding to missing and exploited children's cases, including issuing AMBER Alerts; (2) DOJ actions to integrate U.S. territories into the AMBER Alert network; and (3) DOJ efforts to address certain 2021 NDAA requirements related to the AMBER Alert network, including assisting Tribes and U.S. territories. Among other methods, GAO analyzed DOJ documents, such as its AMBER Alert Best Practices document. GAO interviewed DOJ and Fox Valley officials and relevant U.S. territory officials. GAO also interviewed officials from a nongeneralizable selection of six federally recognized Tribes.

View [GAO-24-106670](#). For more information, contact Gretta L. Goodwin at (202) 512-8777 or [GoodwinG@gao.gov](mailto:GoodwinG@gao.gov).

September 2024

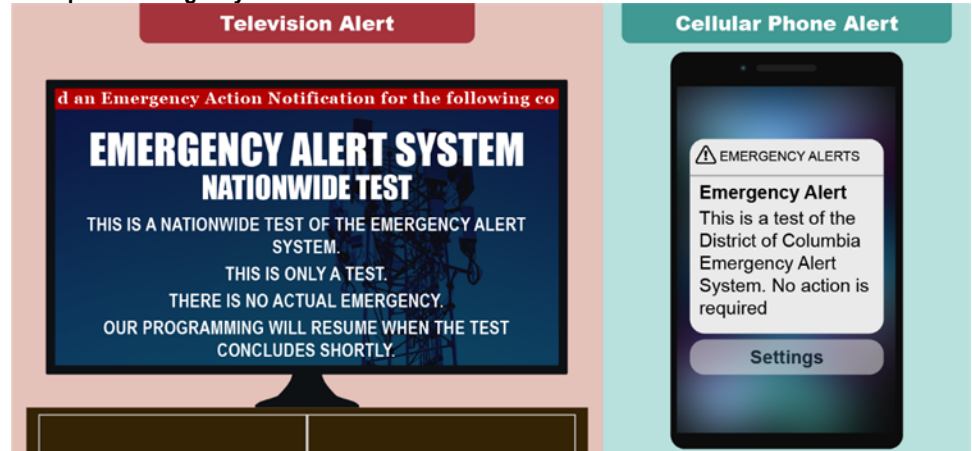
## AMBER ALERT NETWORK

### DOJ Efforts to Include Tribes and U.S. Territories

## What GAO Found

Officials in all five permanently inhabited U.S. territories—American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands—reported having processes for responding to missing and exploited children's cases and alerting the public but identified challenges. Specifically, two locations—the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands—have an AMBER Alert plan. These plans outline the stakeholders involved and criteria for activating an AMBER Alert delivered through cell phones, radio, or television (see figure). However, officials from all five locations reported challenges related to knowledge and training, resources, public awareness, and geographic location.

#### Example of Emergency Alerts Delivered to Televisions and Cellular Phones



Source: GAO graphics; kathayut/stock.adobe.com (background photo). | GAO-24-106670

The Department of Justice (DOJ) leverages Fox Valley Technical College (Fox Valley)—the award recipient of its AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program (AMBER Alert program) cooperative agreement since 2010—to help integrate the U.S. territories into the AMBER Alert network. However, Fox Valley's interaction with the U.S. territories has varied over time—with limited contact with most territories prior to November 2023. Since then, Fox Valley has visited, or plans to visit, all the U.S. territories to assess their AMBER Alert-related needs. To help ensure coordination with the U.S. territories moving forward, in July 2024, DOJ required, and plans to continue to require, the award recipient to conduct outreach to the U.S. territories.

DOJ and Fox Valley took various actions to address certain 2021 statutory requirements related to AMBER Alerts. For example, Fox Valley held symposiums to facilitate coordination and encouraged Tribes and U.S. territories to develop AMBER Alert plans. In addition, in July 2024, DOJ required, and plans to continue to require, the award recipient to develop a process to include Tribes and U.S. territories in its annual report on AMBER Alert plans—as it had not done so before.