



CityWatch System Used in Search of Missing 9-Year Old Girl Campbell County, Wyoming

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CityWatch system was used in helping Campbell County emergency officials in searching for a missing 9-year-old girl who was thought to have been kidnapped from her apartment building. This was the third time CityWatch had been used in the search of a missing child, said Campbell County Emergency Management Coordinator David King.

Certain Gillette residents were notified when a girl went missing about two years ago and again when police wanted to search for a missing 8-year-old boy Aug. 13, although it turned out neither was kidnapped, King said.

Gillette area coal companies actually bought the system for the county about four years ago to warn people of impending blasting, he said. The companies chipped in for the (CityWatch) package so they'd no longer have to waste valuable staff time making phone calls, plus the county got another way to communicate with its residents, King said.

Now CityWatch is used for everything from meeting notices to weather alerts. The fire department used it to tell people about the department's picnic and meeting with the governor July 17, King said. Other times, it's used to warn people in rural areas, where there often isn't local television coverage, of approaching storms.

"It (CityWatch) gives us some flexibility that we wouldn't have otherwise," King said. The system is a good middle ground when broader, national or regional systems won't work or aren't allowed. Alerts sent over the national weather service must be in response to dangers that threaten groups of people in a broad area, such as when there's a flood or a dangerous criminal on the loose.

Amber Alerts, the nationwide system to help find missing children, have specific criteria as well, including:

- Law enforcement confirmation of a kidnapping.
- Risk of serious injury or death.
- The kidnapping of someone 17 years old or younger.

The 9-year-old who disappeared, for example, could not be confirmed as a kidnapping and so was not a candidate for an Amber Alert, King said. According to King, the missing 9-year-old was found at 5:31 a.m. apparently after her kidnapper released her 25 miles from where she was taken. King says it's unlikely the phone calls played a direct role in finding her, but the county got a lot of response from concerned residents who thought they could help.

Officials still had good use for the CityWatch system after the search was over. They called Wright residents again to tell them the girl had been found and to ask them to keep an eye out for the suspect and the vehicle. King said. "It (CityWatch) gives us another tool to reach people."