

SL Tribune: GIS Available to Aid Child Abduction Response

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http://www.sltrib.com/ci_8090629 Software can aid search for missing kids By Pamela Manson Article Last Updated: 01/27/2008 12:30:43 AM MST Statistics show the chances of a kidnapped child being returned home safely are best in the first three hours. After that, the odds plummet.

But thanks to software donated to the Utah Child Abduction Response Team (CART), the chances for a happy ending have gotten better. The program provides clues, pinpoints suspects and narrows the search in seconds.

Lt. Jessica Farnsworth of the Utah Attorney General's Office, who heads CART, said this state-of-the-art mapping program can cut hours off a search.

"It's like having all the legwork done at the beginning," she said.

Making the donation particularly welcome is the fact that CART - which is made up of employees of law-enforcement agencies that offer support services to local police looking for a missing or kidnapped child - has no budget of its own to purchase equipment.

The software, which costs \$10,000, was donated by ESRI (Environmental Systems Research Institute Inc.) in Redlands, Calif. The gift includes technical assistance by the company, which develops geographic information system (GIS) technology.

Russ Johnson, ESRI director of public safety, said the company donates to organizations serving the public and helps them expand their good work.

Paul Murphy, spokesman for the AG's Office, said that work includes whatever it takes to find a kidnapvictim.

"They realize this is an important issue," he said of ESRI officials. "When a child is taken, all the stops are pulled out."

CART is activated when an Amber Alert is sounded. Some or all of the nearly 50 experts can be deployed to help in the rescue effort.

Among their duties are analysis, search and rescue, phone-tip operation and coordination of volunteer searchers. Some team members knock on doors in the neighborhood to find possible witnesses, while others gather film from surveillance cameras at businesses in the area.

And now, ArcGIS, which combines aerial maps with databases, is part of the team.

"The software gives us the opportunity to visualize the crime scene," CART analyst Bill Fossmo said.

So far, the software has not been activated, a fact Fossmo attributes to the success of Amber Alert, which launches an intense search as soon as police are informed of a missing or kidnapped child.

However, the analyst likes having the technology on hand for the day it's needed.

"We're very grateful," Fossmo said.

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