
VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

2011 VACO ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS SUBMISSION:

COMMUNICATIONS (PUBLIC RELATIONS) CATEGORY

Title:

Crisis Communication: Critical Steps Localities Need to Take During and In Advance of an Emergency

Summary:

On December 6, 2010, Tina Smith was found murdered in her home. Realizing Smith's 12-year-old daughter Brittany was missing, police issued an Amber Alert fearing she was abducted after the attack by her mother's boyfriend, Jeff Easley. To find Brittany, Roanoke County Public Information staff managed a communications plan that kept the search in the national news. The plan included message development, media relations, news releases, press conferences, and social media. Five days later a woman who saw the story on CNN recognized Brittany panhandling in California. Brittany returned home to Virginia and Easley is in jail awaiting trial.