

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

ATTORNEY GENERAL J.B. VAN HOLLEN



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Protecting Wisconsin's Children from Internet Predators

Our kids are our most precious resource. Families work very hard to raise them, pass along values and traditions, educate them, and give them every opportunity to achieve their dreams. At the Department of Justice, we also work very hard to protect them. Nowhere is this commitment greater than in our efforts to fight Internet predators.



While the Internet has opened many doors for our children, from education to communication to entertainment, it has also become an active crime scene. Online sex predators use technology to connect with kids, using all the tools they use: instant messaging, picture and video trading, chat rooms, web cameras, web microphones, social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook, and even online gaming networks like X-Box Live.

Child pornographers have invaded the Internet in many forms. Commercial websites, often located abroad, find an endless supply of customers in the U.S., including in Wisconsin. Others use chat rooms to obtain and trade images and movies, while some simply use their own digital cameras, camcorders, or cell phones to manufacture images. As for cell phones, have you heard the term "sexting?" It refers to sexually explicit chat through text messaging that used to take place only in Internet chat rooms. Often, predators use cell phones after meeting children online.

Predators also use file sharing programs like LimeWire, which many parents believe are just used for music. We have identified approximately 15,000 separate computers in our state that possess and offer to distribute this filth.

Nationally, the story is no different. Statistics kept by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) illustrate the scope of the problem:

Since 1992, for example, NCMEC's Child Recognition and Identification System (CRIS) has reviewed more than 15 million child pornography images and movies seized by law enforcement. Since 1998, NCMEC's Cyber Tipline has received more than 600,000 reports of suspected online child exploitation taking place around the country, including some one-thousand tips referred to our ICAC.

To make matters more disturbing, surveys have shown a correlation between child pornographers and child

molesters. In 2005, sobering results were released from a study at the Federal Correctional Institution in Buttner, North Carolina. Researchers indicated that of about 200 federal inmates convicted of Internet child pornography crimes, some 89% admitted to molesting children as well.

The Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force of my office's Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI) is dedicated to identifying and arresting those predators. Since 1998, the ICAC Task Force has arrested more than 600 offenders and executed more than 800 search warrants. To help prevent kids from becoming victims, and to help parents, teachers, and child welfare advocates better protect kids, we have educated more than 160,000 citizens of all ages across Wisconsin. Parents are the first line of defense in protecting their children from online predators. We have included some tips for parents to help protect their children.

At my request, in its last budget, the state legislature funded two additional Special Agent positions for our ICAC Task Force, as well as three new forensic computer analyst positions. Those specialists perform the critical task of finding and analyzing digital evidence, sometimes right after agents seize it. This teamwork often allows us to take the predator into custody literally within an hour from the time a search warrant is executed.

Our DCI professionals partner with a growing list of local law enforcement agencies throughout the state. We now have 55 ICAC affiliates throughout the state, more than doubling our partnerships since 2006. Additionally, we work hand-in-hand with our federal counterparts to investigate crimes against children that result in a wide-range of federal charges.

Let Internet predators take note. My commitment is unceasing. We will identify you, arrest you, and take you off the street; we will follow you to every area of the Internet, no matter where you try to hide; and we will work together in law enforcement to stay one step ahead of you.

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Attorney General Van Hollen's Internet Safety Tips for Parents

- Be an Active Parent. Keep open lines of communications with kids about Internet use. This process should begin as soon as a child gets online.
- Prepare Your Children for the Online World as You Do the Real World. Make no mistake, the online world is real, and so are its dangers. Talk to your children about the benefits and dangers of the Internet. You tell your kids not to jump into a stranger's car alone and why that's dangerous; tell them why they shouldn't travel the Internet Highway alone and why that is dangerous.
- Watch Internet Use. Internet predators are watching your kids online. You need to be, too. One suggestion: keep computers in common areas.
- Use Software Resources. Use filters that block inappropriate websites or online services that are harmful to kids. Consider installing monitoring software, which records everything kids do online, from instant messaging to videos to picture trading.
- It's Not Just the Computer. Find out how your kids are communicating and understand the technology. If you can't appropriately supervise use, don't allow it.

- Report Online Exploitation. Call local law enforcement or the Wisconsin ICAC Task Force at (608) 266-1671.

Find Out More. Visit the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's "net smartz" websites. <http://www.netsmartz411.org/> is geared to help parents; <http://www.netsmartz.org/> includes information for parents, kids, educators, and law enforcement. We use these materials. You should too.

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