

News Release

Office of Attorney General Terry Goddard



STATE OF ARIZONA
DEPARTMENT OF LAW
1275 W. Washington Street
Phoenix, Arizona 85007-2926

CONTACT:
Dianna Jennings
PRESS OFFICE
Phone: (602)-542-8019

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Attorney General Goddard Unveils Internet Safety Programs at Forum

(Gilbert, AZ - Oct. 15, 2003) Law-enforcement officials from around the state met today at the Gilbert Boys & Girls Club for an Attorney General forum about Internet crime and the new Arizona Internet Safety Initiative.

The Arizona Internet Safety Initiative is an alliance of the Arizona Attorney General's Office, Arizona Alliance of Boys and Girls Clubs, NetSmartz Workshop[®] and National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) to put specific emphasis on educating children in Arizona about Internet safety.

The forum also announced the successful implementation of the NetSmartz Internet safety program in Boys and Girls Clubs in Arizona and nationwide. The NetSmartz Workshop is an interactive, educational resource from NCMEC and Boys & Girls Clubs of America (B&GCA) for children (ages 5-17), parents, educators, and law-enforcement that uses age-appropriate activities to teach children about the benefits and dangers of the Internet.

"We are very excited that Attorney General Goddard has chosen to incorporate the NetSmartz Workshop into his Internet Safety Initiative," said Rick Minicucci, President of the NetSmartz Workshop, a division of NCMEC. "Our goal is to support and enhance community Internet Safety efforts by providing educational and entertaining online activities for children of all ages."

The NetSmartz Workshop features animated characters like Clicky, Webster, and Nettie, who play interactive games with users to help them learn how to be safer online. The program was funded via a public-private partnership with the United States Congress and United States Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, NCMEC, and B&GCA. It is available to users at no charge at www.NetSmartz.org.

"It was important to find an Internet safety education program that was not only engaging, but cost effective and proven," said Goddard.

“Protecting our children from Internet predators and scam artists is a very serious issue, especially when many children are ahead of their parents in knowledge of computers and the Internet,” Goddard said.

With Internet usage increasing among youth it is vital for kids to learn the best ways to avoid becoming a victim of an Internet crime, and who to go to if they are in trouble.

“As sophisticated as pre-teens and teens have become, many don’t realize that the types of web sites they visit, the information they post about themselves, and the off-hand remarks they sometimes make can lead to trouble,” said Goddard. “They don’t always know that the personal information they leave on the Internet is an electronic footprint for online predators and thieves to use against them.”

The Alliance of Arizona Boys and Girls Clubs is a non-profit organization that unites over 48 Boys and Girls Club sites throughout Arizona, including Indian reservations and military bases. Bill Bridwell, Chairman of the Alliance, said, “We have a proven program that makes a difference in protecting kids from internet crime. Now, in partnership with law enforcement leaders in Arizona, we can make an even bigger impact.”

Since 1998, the Phoenix Police Department’s Arizona Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force has conducted 680 investigations involving Internet sexual predators in Arizona.

According to a survey from the NCMEC based on interviews with youth between the ages of 10 and 17:

- approximately one in five received a sexual solicitation or approach over the Internet in one year
- one in thirty-three received an aggressive sexual solicitation – a solicitor who asked to meet them somewhere; called them on the telephone; sent them regular mail, money, or gifts
- one in four had an unwanted exposure to pornography in the last year
- one in seventeen was threatened or harassed
- less than 10% of sexual solicitations and only 3% of unwanted exposure episodes were reported to authorities such as a law-enforcement agency, an Internet Service Provider, or a hotline
- only 17% of youth and approximately 10% of parents could name a specific authority, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation, CyberTipline, or an Internet Service Provider, to which they could make a report, although more said they had “heard of” such places

NCMEC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that works in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. NCMEC's congressionally mandated CyberTipline, a reporting mechanism for child sexual exploitation, has handled more than 150,000 leads. Since its establishment in 1984, NCMEC has assisted law enforcement with more than 89,000 missing child cases, resulting in the recovery of more than 73,000 children.

For more information about the NetSmartz Workshop please contact Lisa Cullen at 703-837-6228 or visit www.NetSmartz.org and www.missingkids.com.