

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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COLLIER COUNTY ANNOUNCES A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT TO HELP PROTECT CHILDREN FROM ONLINE VICTIMIZATION

NetSmartz Workshop Will Provide Internet Safety Education to All Students in County

NAPLES, FL, August 16, 2005 – Approximately one in five children online is sexually solicited according to a study by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® (NCMEC). With that in mind Collier County has established an Internet Safety Consortium made up of school, government, law enforcement, and private organizations coming together to help roll out a county-wide Internet safety program called the NetSmartz Workshop™.

With the growing number of children utilizing the Internet, NCMEC has partnered with local officials in the interest of protecting children and teens from online victimization.

"Beginning this school year, the NetSmartz Workshop will be integrated into the educational environment of Collier County," said Collier County Public Schools Superintendent Raymond J. Baker. "It is our goal to educate students about Internet safety, while also making their parents and guardians aware of the potential dangers."

The NetSmartz Workshop (www.NetSmartz.org) is a **free** interactive, educational safety resource from NCMEC and Boys & Girls Clubs of America. Created for children (ages 5-17), parents, guardians, educators, and law-enforcement, NetSmartz uses age-appropriate games and activities to teach children how to stay safer on the Internet.

"We believe that the Internet holds tremendous potential for our nation's youth," said Ernie Allen, president and CEO of NCMEC. "Therefore, we are thrilled to bring NetSmartz to all students and families of Collier County so that we can help make every child's Internet experience a safer one."

NetSmartz will be rolled out to students via educators and law enforcement. NetSmartz' age-appropriate activities will be installed on school computers and many of the teachers have already been trained on the program. The Collier County Sheriff's Office has trained and equipped law-enforcement officers with NetSmartz Internet Safety Presentations created by the Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force Program in partnership with NetSmartz. These age-appropriate presentations for grades K-12, and parents/guardians are 30-minutes in length and can be used by School-Resource Officers and local law-enforcement.

"While we enjoy the convenience of advancing technology, we unfortunately must face new challenges as predators exploit that technology to victimize our children. As your Sheriff, and more importantly a father, I am excited to be a part of this new community partnership," said Collier County Sheriff Don Hunter. "The prevention and investigation of Internet crimes against children is a priority of the Collier County Sheriff's Office and NetSmartz will provide us with valuable tools to thwart this alarming trend."

(more)

NetSmartz is designed to entertain children while educating them about Internet safety; and teaches children three important rules for online safety.

- I will tell an adult I trust if anything makes me feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused.
- I will ask my parents or guardian before sharing my personal information.
- I won't meet in person with anyone I have first "met" online.

“As the parent of a two-year-old boy growing up in an age of technology, his safety and the safety of all children is a high priority for me, as it should be for all parents,” said Collier County Commissioner Tom Henning. “Collier County’s Parks and Recreation Department will help maintain a consistent Internet safety message to children by talking about NetSmartz to kids during its summer, holiday and after school camps. Every member of the consortium will play a critical role in branding NetSmartz as ‘the’ Internet safety message.”

The Naples Police & Emergency Services Department Detective Bureau has gathered information and been trained in NetSmartz as well as the Parks and Recreation Department.

“Educating both parents and children is the best way to protect our children from Internet predators,” said Mayor Bill Barnett. “The City of Naples is committed to the goal of keeping our children safer, and NetSmartz is just one of our critical tools to use in reaching that goal.”

Parents and guardians can also take an active role in protecting their children and teens online by visiting www.NetSmartz.org and downloading Internet safety pledges, tips, and news articles.

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