

## **NEWS RELEASE**

UTAH ATTORNEY GENERAL  
**MARK SHURTLEFF**



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# **WE HAVE THE TECHNOLOGY**

## **UTAH SCHOOLS GET NEW TOOL TO KEEP KIDS SAFER ON INTERNET**

You may not know "Meet-Me Mack" or "Potty-Mouth Pete." But soon your children will meet these make-believe characters and learn from them about the very real dangers on the Internet. The animated characters are part of a state-of-the-art Internet safety curriculum that will be offered soon in Utah schools.

The NetSmartz Workshop<sup>®</sup> has been available on the Internet at [www.NetSmartz.org](http://www.NetSmartz.org) and through Boys & Girls Clubs of America (B&GCA) – but Utah is the first state to adopt the curriculum into its schools. The interactive program was created by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children<sup>®</sup> (NCMEC) and Boys & Girls Clubs of America to teach students how to be safer and make better decisions online.

One study found that approximately one in five children were sexually solicited or approached over the Internet in 1999. Right now authorities are looking for a 14-year-old Michigan girl who allegedly ran away with a 56-year-old convicted murderer she had been corresponding with online.

"Prosecuting online predators is only half the battle," said Attorney General Mark Shurtleff, whose office supervises the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force (ICAC). "Our best chance of protecting Utah's children is to teach them how to avoid being a victim in the first place."

The teaching materials are divided into different age groups. A cartoon character named "Clicky" tells five and six-year-olds to "never give out any of your personal information." Children between the ages of seven and 12 learn from the "WizzyWigs" about different Internet dangers. And older students will study real-life stories from teen victims. They'll also learn about other Internet topics like spamming, hacking, plagiarism, and piracy.

"The classroom is an ideal setting for the NetSmartz Workshop because it educates and entertains. We are happy Utah has chosen to share the program with students of all ages," said Rick Minicucci, chief technology officer for NCMEC. "Computers are an integral part of our children's lives, and those who have used the NetSmartz Workshop report a positive change in their online behavior and increased awareness of the possible dangers."

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Hundreds of teachers gathered today at the Utah Coalition for Educational Technology Conference were the first to hear about the partnership between NetSmartz and Utah schools. During the two-day technology conference, teachers will learn how to use the program in their classrooms.

"The Internet has tremendous applications for education and recreation," said Dr. Steve Laing, state school superintendent for Utah. "But with this powerful resource comes some very serious risks, so we must prepare our children to use it wisely."

The ICAC task force works closely with NCMEC and approached the nonprofit organization about adapting the material for schools. Over the next several months organizers will work with teachers to integrate the material into the classroom. They also plan to create a Utah-specific Intranet site where educators can obtain lesson plans and share their own ideas about Internet safety with other teachers. ICAC has arrested 14 people so far this year for arranging on the Internet to have a sexual relationship with a child.

"Online predators count on our children's innocence and vulnerability to commit their crimes," said Kathy Free, program manager of NCMEC's Exploited Child Unit. "They will manipulate the child by offering attention and validation. The child doesn't see the danger until it's too late."

It was important for Utah to find a program that was not only engaging, but cost-effective and proven. The lesson plans are available at no charge and the program was tested extensively in Boys & Girls Clubs around the country. Parents can also go to the web site to get the latest information on Internet safety.

"Boys & Girls Clubs of America was proud to pilot-test the NetSmartz Workshop," said Jim Jensen, chief professional officer for Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Salt Lake. "We are concerned for the safety of all kids, and we applaud the Attorney General's Office for taking charge in implementing the program in Utah's schools."

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children 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 has access to both the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) and National Law Enforcement Telecommunications System (NLETS). NCMEC operates the CyberTipline, an online mechanism to report child sexual exploitation such as online enticement of children for sex acts and child pornography. Mandated by the U.S. Congress in 1998, the CyberTipline has received over 100,000 reports leading to hundreds of arrests of child predators. Created in 1984 NCMEC has aided law-enforcement officials in the search for more than 87,000 missing children. More than 71,000 children have been recovered as a result. For more information about NCMEC, call 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678) or visit [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com).

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