

# **Sheriff Martin Cuellar Enacts “Protecting ‘R Kids Online” Program Sting Nabs 8 Child Predators in Webb County**



Recently Webb County Sheriff Martin Cuellar enacted a new program called “Protecting ‘R Kids Online” to teach parents and children about online safety. As a component of this new program, Sheriff Cuellar’s deputies executed an undercover sting operation that resulted in the arrest of eight local online child predators.

The first of its kind in South Texas, the special operation took weeks to execute. Specially trained undercover deputies were placed in internet chat rooms posing as underage boys and girls. “Within minutes of logging on, our deputies were openly and repeatedly targeted by child predators,” Sheriff Cuellar stated. Deputies witnessed many of these predators sending illegal pornographic images and engaging in other illegal conduct. Predators were apprehended when they showed up to commit the assault.

Sheriff Cuellar commented, “These are some of the most dangerous individuals. These predators didn’t stop at just chatting. They showed up to arranged meetings, many brought contraband such as alcohol. One predator alone had nearly 3,000 images of child pornography while another had bomb-making materials and a hit list of local people he wished to kill.”



The Sheriff's Office hopes to send two important messages. First to parents: we are working to protect your kids online, but we need your help. Know who your kids are talking to and teach them how to handle it if they are approached by a predator. Second to online predators: you never know if the underage "child" you are soliciting will be an undercover deputy. We are out there, we will catch you, and we will throw you in jail.

Sheriff Cuellar plans to continue the special undercover operation indefinitely in an effort to shut down as many online child predators in Webb County as possible. Sheriff Cuellar plans to train more deputies and expand the program.

The Webb County Sheriff's Office has also produced an information pamphlet to help parents know what steps to take to protect their children online.

"Our hope is that we can educate kids, their parents and their teachers about the dangers online, how to prevent exposure to predators, how to recognize predatory behavior and what to do when inappropriate behavior is detected," Sheriff Cuellar concluded.

In the upcoming school year, Sheriff Cuellar and his deputies will begin including online safety tips in their presentations to community groups and school children.

### **Internet Safety Tips for Students and Parents**

#### **Learn the 4 Rs**

- \*Recognize – Techniques used by online predators to deceive.
- \*Refuse – request for personal information
- \*Respond – assertively if you are ever in an uncomfortable situation online. Exit the program, log off or turn off the computer, tell a trusted adult, or call the police.
- \*Report- to a trusted adult any suspicious or dangerous contact that makes you feel uncomfortable.

For Students: Most studies agree there are 77 million of you on the internet! Almost as many students as there are things to do online. The internet has infinite possibilities, and it is to get lost. Sometimes when you are lost you discover wonderful new places, but just as easily you can find yourself in a dangerous situation. You must protect yourself from the pitfalls lurking online. To help you, I-SAFE America has come up with these tips.

- Guard your identifying information (name, sex, age, address, school, teams). It only takes a little information for a predator to identify you.
- Always remember, responsible adults for not pursue relationships with kids and teens.
- Make your username generic and anonymous.
- Make your online profile generic and anonymous.
- Know how to exit an inappropriate website.
- Attachments in e-mails from strangers can contain viruses and worms.
- Pictures are great to hand to a friend, but it's not cool to send them to an internet "friend."
- Posting your pictures on the internet gives hackers the chance to doctor your picture and make fun of you to everyone on the World Wide Web.
- Chat room "friends" are not always who they say they are.

#### Internet Safety Tips for Families

- Use the internet with your kids.
- Teach kids never to give their personal information to people they meet online, especially in chat rooms and on bulletin boards.
- Instruct your child never to plan a face-to-face meeting with online acquaintances, and to notify you if they are approached for offline meeting.
- Establish clear ground rules for internet use for your family.
- Tell your children not to respond if they receive offensive or dangerous e-mail, chat requests, or other communications, and to leave if they go to a web site that makes them uncomfortable.
- If you become worried that your child or another child is in danger, don't hesitate to contact the authorities.

For more information please contact:

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