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NEWS RELEASE

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IDAHO'S U.S. ATTORNEY LAUNCHES PROJECT SAFE CHILDHOOD

U.S. Attorney Tom Moss, Idaho Attorney General Lawrence Wasden and officials of federal, state and local law enforcement agencies launched a new initiative against Internet predators and child pornographers at a news conference in Boise this morning.

At the conference, new television and radio public service announcements were played, produced by the U.S. Department of Justice, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the Ad Council. The spots carry the theme "Think Before You Post," and urge teenagers to remember that anything they post can be accessed by anyone else, including people who may have criminal intentions.

"It is no exaggeration to say that we are in the midst of an epidemic of sexual exploitation of our children," said Moss, blaming the increase on the Internet and other advances in high technology. At any one time, Moss said, there may be upwards of 50,000 predators trolling the Internet for vulnerable victims, in addition to the thousands of people who are producing and sharing child pornography seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

Moss said studies have shown that among children who use the Internet at least 11 hours a week, one in five will receive an unwanted sexual solicitation. Most of those children are girls, Moss said, while most of the predators are adult men.

Child pornography also plays a major role in the sexual exploitation of children, Moss said, both in motivating pedophiles to duplicate what they see, and in breaking down the child's inhibitions as part of the predator's "grooming" process.

"It's time we stopped thinking of child pornography as a victimless crime," Moss said, citing a study in which 85 percent of men in prison for child pornography admitted that they had

also had in-person sexual contact with children but had not gotten caught.

Idaho Attorney General Lawrence Wasden has been traveling the state for the last two years, presenting a 20-minute Power Point called ProtecTeens. At this morning's news conference he said nearly 100,000 copies of the CD have been distributed statewide, and he recalled one presentation during which a young girl told a police officer that she had been in Internet contact with a man from Texas, and that he was traveling to Post Falls to meet her. With that information, the man was arrested before he could abuse the girl.

Wasden said part of the problem is that teens often believe they are invulnerable, that "it won't happen to me." "Social networking sites such as MySpace are of particular concern because kids can – and do – post personally identifying information that a predator can use to locate a child, not only in the virtual world, but in the real world as well."

Moss and Wasden agreed that parents are the first line of defense, and that one of the most important things parents can do is to place household computers in heavy traffic areas, where they can keep track of what sites their children visit and what they post.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Jim Peters, the U.S. Attorney's PSC Coordinator, recalled his early days of prosecuting child sexual abuse, and said the level of interest and concern represented by today's news conference "would never have happened then."

Peters also called the term "child pornography" a misnomer, saying many people think of it as a baby in a bathtub or a young teen in a sexual pose. "When we in law enforcement talk about 'child pornography,'" he said, "what we really mean are crime scene photos of real children being raped, abused and tortured."

Project Safe Children (PSC) is a two-pronged initiative launched by the U.S. Justice Department to educate parents and teens about the dangers of the Internet, and to increase cooperation among federal, state and local agencies in locating and prosecutors child pornographers and Internet predators.

Peters said Idaho's PSC has been quietly active since last fall and has drawn statewide attention. Three meetings have been held thus far, he said, and the list of interested detectives, sheriffs, police chiefs and prosecutors has grown to more than 60. Peters said he has already seen an increase in the number of child pornography and sexual solicitation cases being investigated and prosecuted in the state, and he predicted the numbers will keep rising as public awareness grows.

In addition to the local heads of the FBI, the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Marshals Service, this morning's news conference was attended by representatives of the Boise Police Department, the Ada County Sheriff's Office, the Department of Juvenile Corrections, the Pocatello Police Department, the Twin Falls Police Department, and the Shoshone County Sheriff's Office.

NOTE TO THE MEDIA: All stations should have received the new PSAs from the Ad Council. If your station hasn't, contact the Ad Council or Kimberly Smith at the Department of Justice, 202-514-2007. For general information about PSC, contact Kimberly Smith or go to the PSC website, www.projectsafekidhood.gov.