



FACT SHEET: PROJECT SAFE CHILDHOOD

Project Safe Childhood

- Project Safe Childhood is a Department of Justice initiative launched in 2006 to combat the proliferation of technology-facilitated crimes involving the sexual exploitation of children. The threat of sexual predators soliciting children for physical sexual contact is well-known and serious, and the danger of perpetrators who produce, distribute, and possess child pornography is equally, if not more, dramatic and disturbing. There is often an international dimension to these crimes such as when offenders travel to victimize children outside of the United States or view live video streams (in addition to recorded still and video images) of children being abused in foreign countries.
- The Department of Justice is committed to the safety and well-being of every child and has placed a high priority on combating sexual exploitation of minors. Through a network of federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies and advocacy organizations, Project Safe Childhood attempts to protect children by investigating and prosecuting offenders involved in child sexual exploitation.
- The Department of Justice expanded Project Safe Childhood in May 2011 to encompass all federal crimes involving the sexual exploitation of a minor, including sex trafficking of a minor and crimes against children committed in Indian country. Failure to register as a sex offender offenses now also fall within the reach of Project Safe Childhood.
- Project Safe Childhood is implemented through partnerships including, among others, the following organizations: United States Attorneys' Offices and the Executive Office for United States Attorneys; the Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section of the Department's Criminal Division; Internet Crimes Against Children Task Forces; federal law enforcement partners, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, Homeland Security Investigations, United States Secret Service, and the United States Marshals Service; advocacy organizations such as the National Institute of Justice; and state, local, tribal, and military law enforcement officials.

Enforcement & Casework

- Under Project Safe Childhood, the number of federal prosecutions involving child sexual exploitation has increased significantly. These prosecutions have resulted from an increased number of international, federal, state, and local investigations.
- In fiscal year 2011, United States Attorneys' Offices obtained 2713 indictments, against 2929 defendants, for offenses involving the sexual exploitation of a minor. This represents a 15 percent increase in the number of indictments over fiscal year 2007 (in which 2364 indictments were filed against 2470 defendants).
- Since the beginning of fiscal year 2007, more than 11,447 defendants have been convicted in federal courts of an offense related to the sexual exploitation of a minor. These crimes have ranged from production of obscene visual depictions of minors engaged in sexually explicit conduct to receipt, distribution, possession, and/or production of child pornography to the direct physical, sexual abuse of a minor.
- Since Project Safe Childhood began, United States Attorneys' Offices have obtained life sentences in at least 64 Project Safe Childhood prosecutions. Federal life sentences do not include the possibility of parole.
- From the launch of Project Safe Childhood through January 2011, more than 3,500 children depicted in child pornography have been identified through enhanced law enforcement coordination, multi-jurisdictional collaborative efforts, and additional contributions by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.
- Since the inception of Project Safe Childhood, the Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section (CEOS), in partnership with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Homeland Security Investigations, and the United States Postal Inspection Service, has developed and coordinated more than twenty nationwide investigations targeting the production, distribution, receipt, and possession of child pornography by more than 8,000 individuals residing in the United States. Many of these cases are prosecuted by United States Attorney Offices throughout the nation, often in conjunction with trial attorneys and additional resources from CEOS.
- As part of Project Safe Childhood, the U.S. Department of Justice has collaborated with international law enforcement partners to secure the arrest of child pornography producers and collectors around the world. In Operation Delego, for example, the Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section helped identify a global child pornography network and facilitate the arrest of offenders in thirteen countries on five continents. Several major international law investigations – such as Operation Joint Hammer and Operation Nest Egg – have successfully dismantled multiple international child pornography organizations. In doing so, the Department of Justice has coordinated efforts with international law enforcement agencies such as Eurojust, the judicial cooperation arm of the European Union, to ensure that every available resource is put to use. These alliances also ensure that child pornography distributors, collectors, and producers around the world are identified, stopped, and held accountable for their actions.

- In August 2010, the Department released the first-ever National Strategy for Child Exploitation Prevention and Interdiction in order to formalize key partnerships, streamline prevention and prosecution, improve regional and interagency collaboration, and efficiently utilize all available resources.
- Project Safe Childhood has also been highly effective in arresting and convicting offenders who have traveled or attempted to travel across interstate or foreign borders with an intent to either sexually abuse a minor or engage in other illicit conduct. Many defendants have held positions of public trust – ranging from an elementary school principal to a State Department-affiliated special agent.
- Since the inception of its CyberTipline in 1998, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children has processed more than 1.3 million tips related to incidents of child sexual exploitation, the majority of which relate to activities connected to child pornography and the internet. Since it was created, the CyberTipline has seen a dramatic increase in the number of reports received. For example, in the first 10 months of operation, the CyberTipline received a total of 4,500 reports. In 2011 the CyberTipline received more than 326,000 reports.

Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Forces

- In 1998, the Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Juvenile Delinquency Prevention recognized the significant risk of technology-facilitated child exploitation, and developed the Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) task force program. The purpose of an ICAC task force is to help regional, state, and local law enforcement agencies acquire the knowledge, equipment, and personnel resources they need to prevent, investigate, and stop sexual crimes against minors. Congress recognized the value of ICAC task forces in the PROTECT Act of 2008 which authorized the program through fiscal year 2013.
- As of November 2011, there are 61 Internet Crimes Against Children task forces across the country, each composed of federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. These task forces represent more than 3,000 federal, state, and local law enforcement and prosecutorial agencies.
- Since the program's inception in 1998, the Internet Crimes Against Children task forces have reviewed more than 280,000 complaints of alleged child sexual victimization resulting in the arrest of more than 30,000 individuals.
- In fiscal year 2011, Internet Crimes Against Children investigations led to more than 5,700 arrests, over 45,000 forensic examinations of digital evidence, and the identification of hundreds of children who were victims of some form of abuse and neglect.

Continued Support for Project Safe Childhood Efforts

- In July 2006, the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act (AWA) gave the United States Marshals Service (USMS) three main missions: (1) investigate registered sex offenders who violate the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act; (2) assist state, local, tribal, and territorial authorities in locating and apprehending non-compliant sex offenders; and (3) identify and locate sex offenders who are displaced as a result of a major disaster. The USMS instituted the National Sex Offender Targeting Center, located in Arlington, Virginia, to achieve its mission under the AWA in 2009.
- In fiscal year 2011, the United States Marshals Service (USMS) arrested 12,144 sex offenders, opened 2,720 Adam Walsh Act investigations, issued 730 warrants for Adam Walsh Act violations, and arrested 586 Adam Walsh Act fugitives. The USMS also completed 318 sex offender-specific operations nationwide.
- The United States Marshals Service's National Sex Offender Targeting Center has partnered with several agencies, including the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), the U.S. State Department's Diplomatic Security Service, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and SMART to identify 18 USC 2250 violations by tracking sex offenders who travel in and out of the United States and fail to comply with the mandated registration requirements.
- The National Sex Offender Targeting Center coordinated with the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) to create a system to notify the State Department's Diplomatic Security Service (DSS) of U.S. sex offender travel to regional security officer areas of responsibility. The agreement with DSS and INTERPOL is an important step forward in expanding the United States Marshals Service's participation around the world to meet the growing challenges of tracking non-compliant sex offenders who travel internationally.
- Recent operations have required international law enforcement to use all available investigative measures to overcome offenders' use of sophisticated technologies, such as anonymizers and encryption. United States Attorney Offices work jointly with the Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section's (CEOS) High Technology Investigative Unit to prosecute cutting-edge, nuanced child exploitation crimes. CEOS also trains Assistant U.S. Attorneys (AUSAs) and other partners in child exploitation prosecution, publishes a quarterly newsletter, and distributes a case digest to AUSAs and federal agents. CEOS is at the forefront of campaigns aimed at combating international child sex tourism, such as the Innocence Lost Initiative.
- Teams from all 93 U.S. Attorney Offices have attended week-long regional comprehensive training on Project Safe Childhood statutes and policy. In addition, national training took place in April 2011 in San Jose, California and attracted approximately 1400 attendees from state, local, non-profit, tribal, international, and federal agencies.

- In October 2011, the Attorney General hosted a program entitled “A Call to Action: Protecting Children from Sexual Exploitation” at the Gaylord National Conference Center in Maryland. Three panels included experts from around the world who discussed topics related to deterring, detecting, and interdicting crimes against children and have made policy recommendations based upon the discussions held during this event. Dr. Michael Bourke of the United States Marshals Service Behavioral Analysis Unit, Dr. Michael Seto from Canada, and Dr. Joe Sullivan from Ireland were tasked with providing the Attorney General with written recommendations to consider in the Department’s fight to stop child exploitation and abuse.

The Future of Project Safe Childhood: Ongoing Challenges

- Attorney General Eric Holder has emphasized the two following principles in Project Safe Childhood’s future mission: (1) efforts must expand beyond enforcement and prosecutions to include proven prevention and deterrence efforts; and (2) protecting children means addressing all federal offenses that involve the exploitation of minors, not just Internet-facilitated crimes.
- Even after child pornography producers are identified and convicted, their recordings still circulate online and elsewhere for the continued consumption by other like-minded offenders; therefore, the danger of the production, distribution, and possession of child pornography remains multifaceted and disturbing for victims all over the world.
- Project Safe Childhood relies upon the ongoing efforts by and relationships between law enforcement agencies, nonprofit entities (including schools), advocacy organizations, and many others. In order for Project Safe Childhood to continue to fulfill its mission, all partners will need to continue to work collaboratively to keep pace with those who seek to harm any child.