

Most Wanted - A very (proactive) public protection

www.ceop.gov.uk/wanted

In November 2006, The Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre launched the UK's first national website, dedicated to locating missing sex offenders who have committed sexual offences against children and who have failed to comply with their notification requirements. It was the first time such a move – that of publishing the details of missing child sex offenders - had been undertaken within the UK on a nationwide scale.

The initiative reflected, and still does, the determination of law enforcement partners to work together to ensure that every available step is taken to manage offenders convicted of child sex abuse. Within the UK, those offenders who fail to notify their relevant details as per the requirements of the Sex Offender Register are committing a criminal offence under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 - an arrestable offence with a punishment of up to five years imprisonment.

The site was developed in association with the charity, Crimestoppers - a specialist partner of the CEOP Centre. Details of the missing individuals are posted on the website following a comprehensive written risk assessment, enabling law enforcement to work directly with members of the public. Any sightings can then be reported to the appropriate authorities or to Crimestoppers anonymously.

The Most Wanted website only publishes details of the highest risk registered sex offenders, after careful consideration of the risks around the public disclosure of the personal information identifying offenders. The public are encouraged to play a part in providing information about missing offenders but the site emphasises the importance of responsible behaviour and seeks to deter the public from vigilante action. The site maximises every available opportunity to locate those missing offenders in order to protect children, young people and communities and to the public's credit, reports of sightings of individuals have lead to arrests and no vigilantism has been reported to date.

Members of the public are encouraged to register via the site to receive updates - either when a new offender is posted or when an offender has been located. To date, there are over 2000 subscribers and they span many countries around the world.

This spread of countries has been influential in the re-arrest of those offenders who had been missing and are now back in the management system, as they had been located in countries outside of the UK. CEOP and UK law enforcement agencies have built up an excellent working relationship with foreign counterparts to ensure those individuals are brought back to the UK where they will be held to account.

To mark the first anniversary of the website in November 2007 and for the first time in the UK, the images of two offenders who had been missing for a number of years were 'age progressed' by the leading UK charity Missing People and posted on the Most Wanted site. This was done to ensure that members of the public - and especially those working with children – had the very latest information on how these convicted offenders may look now.

This age-progression technique has been used previously for different crimes and is now being used to help track missing offenders. CEOP is pushing the boundaries and using technology against those who think they can evade the reach of law enforcement.

Tracking registered sex offenders convicted of sexual offences against children who have gone missing from their police management is an important and high profile part of the work undertaken by the CEOP Centre and can only be done in partnership with UK police forces as well as through the partnership with Crimestoppers.

The Offender Management team in CEOP's Intelligence Faculty work alongside police Public Protection Officers (PPO) and Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) to locate missing high risk offenders.

As part of the risk assessment for individuals on the Sex Offenders Register, PPOs will make scheduled and unscheduled visits to the homes of sex offenders living in the community. Many PPOs are reporting back to CEOP that just the *threat* of going onto the Most Wanted website is acting as a real and present deterrent for child sex offenders who are then staying within police management. One located offender also stated that he would remain compliant as he had not realised the extent that law enforcement would go to in order to locate him.

Once their details are posted on to the site, this information is available to anyone in the world so wherever they travel, they risk being identified by a member of the public and their details may well be on the internet forever.

These key points are also illustrated on handouts that have been created by CEOP provided to PPOs to give to registered sex offenders when they are visited, or at initial registration, to act as a discussion tool. The handouts act as a reminder to the sex offender that by being non-compliant they lose their right to anonymity and their details can be placed in the public domain.

CEOP are always seeking to develop new and innovative ways of using the Most Wanted website as a tool to hinder those sex offenders who have sexual offended against children and then gone missing.

Most Wanted key statistics

- Eleven missing child sex offenders have been located to date out of 15 posted, as a direct result of featuring on the site
- The eleven offenders were missing for a combined total of 25 years
- Over 2000 members of the public from all over the world have registered to receive updates on new offenders whose details are posted on the site.
- Number of hits on website- waiting for these