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INFORMATIONAL COLUMN

REP. GARY HEBL OFFERS PARENTS INTERNET SAFETY TIPS

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FOR MORE INFORMATION
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MADISON - With summertime here and the kids on summer break, it's important for parents to watch their children's activity on the World Wide Web when they're using the home computer.

The Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection has a list of resources on its website for parents to use to monitor their kids' activity on the Internet.

According to numerous studies on the subject of child Internet usage, the prevalence of online predators is on the rise and the most important thing parents can do is ask good questions and talk to their kids about the content their checking out online.

A national survey of 1,500 youth aged 10 to 17 conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention found:

- 71% reported receiving messages online from someone they don't know.
- 45% have been asked for personal information by someone they don't know.
- 30% have considered meeting someone that they've only talked to online

Here are a few of the

Never give out identifying information such as Name, Home Address, School Name, or Telephone Number in a public message such as at a chat room or on bulletin boards. Never send a person a picture of you without first checking with your parent or guardian.

Never respond to creepy messages or bulletin board items that are: Suggestive, Obscene, Looking for a fight, Threatening, Make you feel uncomfortable. Be careful when someone offers you something for nothing, such as gifts and money. Be very

careful about any offers that involve your coming to a meeting or having someone visit your house.

Tell your parent or guardian right away if you come across any information that makes you feel uncomfortable.

Never arrange a face to face meeting without telling your parent or guardian. If your parent or guardian agree to the meeting, make sure that you meet in a public place and have parent or guardian with you.

Remember that people online may not be who they seem. Because you can't see or even hear the person it would be easy for someone to misrepresent him or herself. Someone indicating that she is a "12-year-old-girl" could really be an older man.

Don't give out any personal information about your self via E-mail unless you are sure that you are dealing with someone that you and your parents know and trust.

Get to know your "online friends" just as you get to know all of your other friends.

Internet Do's and Don'ts

DO use the Internet to help with schoolwork. The Internet is a source of great volumes of information. It's like having the world's largest library at your fingertips.

DO use the Internet to "visit" far away places such as museums.

DO use the Internet to meet children in other countries or to keep in touch with pen pals who live far away in this country or other countries.

Some on-line services host chat rooms especially for children, and monitors them periodically for safety. You can safely establish an international pen pal through an existing program sponsored by your school, and then expand your pen pal communications to the Internet if your pen pal has access to Internet e-mail at his or her school or home.

DO be careful about talking to "strangers" on a computer network. Who are these people anyway? Some people say and do things that are NOT NICE.

DO respect the privacy of other users on the Internet, just as you expect your privacy to be respected. How would you feel if someone read your private e-mail or your grades?

DO use the Internet to learn more about universities and colleges that you may be interested in attending. Almost all colleges post some information on the Internet. Many colleges let you take a "virtual tour" of the campus, or submit applications for admission or financial aid applications on line.

DO be careful when you "download" (copy) programs from the Internet. Use a virus scan program before loading it on your computer. Some programs on the Internet contain viruses that can harm your computer.

DON'T give your password to anyone. Passwords are intended to protect your computer and your files. It's like giving the key to your house away!

DON'T answer messages that make you feel uncomfortable because they seem improper, indecent, or threatening. TELL A GROWN-UP RIGHT AWAY.

DON'T give any personal information, such as your name, your family's address, phone number, credit card or calling card numbers, your social security number, your school's name, or your picture to anyone on a computer network that you don't personally know.

DON'T arrange to meet anyone you've met on the Internet without telling your parents. Some people on the Internet lie, about who they are, how old they are, and why they want to meet you.

DON'T steal copyrighted computer programs ("software") by copying it from the Internet. This is the same as stealing it from a store. People work hard to develop new programs and deserve to be paid for them. If software designers don't get paid for their work, they can't continue creating new software, such as new educational games or tools that help with schoolwork.

DON'T try to break into computers. It's not a game. It's a crime and it's an invasion of privacy. Computers often contain sensitive information. How would you feel if someone broke into a computer and changed your grades? Deleted your term paper? Cut off your telephone?

DON'T make copies of any copyrighted material, like books, magazines, or music without the permission of the author, publisher or artist. Copyrighted works are available (usually illegally) on the Internet. You are committing a crime if you copy and distribute them.

DON'T copy material that you find on the Internet and pretend that it's your own work. It's the same as copying a book or magazine article and pretending that you wrote it. It's easy to get caught. Remember your teacher and thousands of other students have access to the same material.

For more information contact the Division of Consumer Protection at 800-422-7128 or [file a complaint](#).

New technology and government deregulation has been bringing more competition and more consumer services to the computer, telephone, and cable TV industries. The competition is good for consumers because it keeps prices low and services high. But along with the good things on the information superhighway are new ways to mislead consumers.

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection's telecommunications rule heads off emerging problems by requiring cable TV and telecommunications companies to make clear disclosures before billing consumers.

For example, the rule prohibits a marketing tactic called slamming, having your long distance telephone company switched without your permission. Consumer protection has investigated a significant number of complaints and has referred them for prosecution.

The rule also prohibits negative options. A negative option billing occurred when a cable TV company charged its customers for a movie channel they had not ordered. Customers were told to cancel the service if they did not want it.

The rule also makes it illegal to charge a cancellation or disconnection fee for telecommunications or cable subscriptions unless the fee is disclosed in the subscription.

To report violations of the telecommunications rule or for more information contact the Division of Consumer Protection at 800-422-7128 or [file a complaint](#).

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