Internet Safety

Introduction

   To date, it is estimated that well over 50% of all Americans own a personal computer, or "PC",   and that most of these are connected to the Internet. In the next 5 to 7 years, PC's will be as common in homes as the television or microwave oven. It is no doubt that   PC's are here to stay and that they are becoming increasingly necessary for research and the education of our children. All parents should however, be aware that there are dangers involved for inexperienced users, especially our children. The following articles outline some of the dangers as well as ways to minimize the risk of an incident. If any of the following incidents should happen to yourself or a family member, please contact the Sheriff's Office immediately. The Internet is without a doubt, a wonderful modern day tool. It just happens to include modern day hazards. Knowledge is the key to preventing problems. Nobody should be afraid to use the Internet, but, everybody should know the bad with the good.

Understanding Internet Terms

   As a concerned parent, you should familiarize yourself with general terms and basic procedures for being "Online". The terms "Online" and "Surfing the Net" are interchangeable. They both mean that your PC is currently connected to the Internet . "E-mail" stands for Electronic Mail, which can be sent and received to/from any other person in the world who has an Internet connection and an "E-mail Address". The Federal Government estimates that over 20 Billion "E-mails" are sent daily across the Internet. A Web Address is a person or company's "Address" on the Internet. The Web address is different from the E-mail address. For instance, by typing "www.yahoo.com" in your web browser, you will be taken to the Web pages of Yahoo, one of the bigger search engines of the Internet. A Search Engine is a Web Site that allows you to type in a topic, and it will provide you with all Web Sites that are related to that topic. Think of a search engine as an address book for the Internet. "Chat Rooms" are forums where a user can join in and chat with other individuals from all over the world who share similar interests. The term Chat refers to typing messages, in real time, back and forth with others in the forum. "IRC" or "MIRC" (Internet Relay Chat) are programs used to gain access to these forums. "News Groups" are another source of information which users can search through to find information on all types of topics. The difference between a News Group and a Chat Room is that messages are posted in News Groups and other users respond by posting a reply. It is actually an electronic bulletin board without the "Live" interaction with the other users, which is found in Chat Rooms.

Uses for the Internet

   There are so many uses for the Internet today, that it is almost unbelievable. Information on just about every subject imaginable can be located somewhere on the Net. Conducting research on the Internet can provide your child with a wealth of information on virtually any topic. Pictures, Music, Art Works, Animals, Video Clips... the list is endless. Education is probably the most wonderful aspect of letting your child Online. The Internet also allows you to send and receive E-mail, Join Chat Rooms, and view News Group Articles. You can read about Public Events, World News, Weather, Travel and even play a variety of games online. You can book hotel, rental car or airline reservations. Also, almost every major publication in the world has a web site. You can read books in the Library of Congress, a past article from Time Magazine or listen to Dr. Martin Luther King's speech through Streaming Audio technology. You can shop online as well. This is a huge benefit for consumers in many ways. It is relatively safe, convenient and allows you to purchase items from stores that do not have a location near you. Online shopping is also very beneficial for those who like to "price shop" or those shopping for hard to find items.

Internet Hazards

One of the fastest growing online problems is pornography on the Internet. Pornography is by far the most profitable market in Internet history. Industry personnel indicate that more than 100 new pornography sites are introduced on the Internet DAILY. Since many of these sites are hosted from other countries, it is impossible to stop the alarming rate of its production. Pornographic materials can be pictures, sound files or video clips downloaded into your PC. This material could be on Internet Web Sites, Newsgroups or Chat that is inappropriate for children can take place in certain Chat Rooms. Most Chat Rooms have a rating much like a movie. Make yourself aware of the Chat Rooms your child seems to show interest in. Utilize the available "Blocking Software" on the Internet. This is the first line defense against online incidents. Software such as Net Nanny, CyberSitter, CyberPatrol, BESS, SurfWatch, SmartFilter, X-Stop, NetRated, I-Gear and SafeSurf allows parents to effectively "block" key words or topics from being viewed in your home. This type of software can be downloaded directly off of the Internet or purchased in most computer stores.

The Internet has also introduced other hazards that many parents would never think of. Information on topics such as Arson, building explosives and even how to cheat phone companies can found on "Rogue" or "Hacker" Web Sites. Websites that contain illegal material are immediately closed by the Government as soon as they are located but, it may take months for the Government to catch a professional Hacker or illegal pornography ring. Children can be exposed to this material before the Hackers are caught if appropriate guidelines for Internet use are not previously established by parents. Again, the blocking software will prove very effective against materials concerning these topics.

There have been only a small number of abductions from personal meetings arranged on the Internet, but even one is one too many. When communicating with a person on the Internet through Email or Chat Rooms, NEVER give out personal information such as your real name, address or phone number. Chat Rooms should be monitored very closely by parents if you allow your child to participate in Chat. News Groups normally contain information most related to by adults. If your child is utilizing News for research, make sure that the Groups your child is viewing is appropriate for them.

If you are purchasing an item Online, remember that even though it is relatively safe, you should know the company that you are dealing with. Call the phone number on the web site to verify that it is even a real business. Some websites may appear to be a large business, yet when you call the phone number it may be a pager, answering service or even a persons home. Beware of purchasing items from a website that indicates no phone number or address. It is however, normally very safe to use a credit card online with a large, reputable and well-known retail store. Also, beware of Scams through Email or Newsgroups. If you are an Investor, and someone is soliciting money from you, check with the Better Business Bureau or Dunn and Bradstreet before you make a decision. Always remember, If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

Prevention   Prevention   Prevention

As scary as the Internet may seem to you right now, it is actually becoming a necessary part of the everyday business and educational world. In the very near future, a high school graduate who cannot operate a PC would be equivalent to current graduate who cannot read or write. The Internet, when properly used, can provide you and your family with fantastic amounts of information, entertainment and services in a very safe manner. The key to evading a bad incident is prevention, and the key to prevention is having knowledge as to how the Internet is used in your home. Establish practical guidelines with your children and use basic common sense. Utilize blocking software to avoid inappropriate material from being viewed in your home. The result will be a child who grows up with a 21st century education and who can operate a PC long before they can drive a car! Listed below are

some basic guidelines that you may want to consider before letting your child Online. You should set the guidelines in your home and print a copy of them. Keep this list close to your PC and make sure that your children fully understand the guidelines for Internet Usage as well as the possible punishments if they are not followed. If you are new to the Internet, take the initiative to learn about what is going on out there. In time, you will gain experience, learn what a wonderful tool the Internet can be and you will take control of the Internet from your own home or office. Safe Surfing!

1.) A home PC used for Internet should be located in a Family Room or Den. Placing it in a Childs room may make it difficult for parents to properly monitor Internet Usage.

2.) Establish a password on your PC for getting online. This will prevent your child from getting on the Internet without your knowledge.

3.) Know what type of software is loaded on your PC. "IRC" or "MIRC" clients are used mainly for Chat Rooms. If you are not allowing your child to participate in Chat Rooms, but you find this type of software on your PC then beware. News Groups are best viewed with software such as Forte FreeAgent or News Monger. Also know that News Groups can be configured through your web browser (Netscape or IExplorer). Read the documentation for your current web browser for details. UTILIZE the Blocking Software described above.

4.) Stress to your child to NEVER give out personal information such as real names, address, phone number, where they work or attend school. If a person requests your child to me meet them in person or call them on the telephone, instruct the child to immediately notify you.

5.) If you receive inappropriate materials through email, or if an inappropriate web site is accidently found, tell your child to immediately notify you. If the material is illegal, then immediately call the Wayne County Sheriff's Office. If the materials are inappropriate for your child, then adjust the settings on your blocking software to eliminate the website from your home.

6.) Spend time with your child on the Internet. It will probably amaze you at what your child can teach you. You can see first hand what types of activities your child is interested in.