

New Website Tracks Predatory Sex Offenders in Oregon

by K_Guice

Wonder who is living in the neighborhood and if it is someone to beware of? As of June 29th a new Oregon State Police website began providing information on over 14,500 registered sex offenders in 36 counties, 700 of which are classified as predatory.

The website's origins date back to September 6, 2005 when Governor Ted Kulongoski signed a bill into law mandating the posting of predatory sex offenders to a public internet site. Those are offenders who are determined to present the highest risk of reoffending or are found to be a sexually violent dangerous offender.

<http://sexoffenders.oregon.gov/> "Oregonians finally have a place to look up predatory sex offenders in their neighborhoods," said state Rep. Jerry Krummel, R-Wilsonville. "Hopefully, this will give parents one more tool to help protect their children."

Prior to the creation of the public site it was difficult in many counties to track down information about area sex offenders.

On the new site, which received more than a million hits in its first full day of public availability, people are able to look up a persons name, address, description, recent photo (if available) and contact information for the authorities.

"People can use it to help protect their family and notify law enforcement," said Gregg Hastings, a lieutenant and public information officer for the Oregon State Police. "For example, if they learn that person has moved and we may not be aware of that, they then become our eyes in the community."

However, Lt. Hastings said it is crucial that people understand there are rules for those using this site. "It

is for public awareness and not for public retribution," he said. "It is to inform not to harm those who are being listed. If you do take things into your own hands, you may find your picture in the media and be the one going to jail," he added.

Not all sex offenders on the website are classified predatory. In addition, the rules for an offender getting that label have changed according to Charity Hobold, a supervisor for Deschutes County Department of Parole & Probation.

In February of 2005, the Oregon Supreme Court ruled that the state parole board was illegally designating some convicts as predatory sex offenders because they are not allowed a hearing by the board.

The court unanimously said the board's practice of automatically designating some convicts as predators because of their serious past criminal records ignores their right to give new evidence in their favor.

The parole board uses a state corrections department scoring scale ranging from one to 12 that ranks the chances that offenders will repeat their crimes.

The scale uses factors including the history of sex offenses, whether weapons were used in the crimes and if the victim or victims were strangers. Parole board rules require it to designate offenders as predators if they reach the highest-risk scores. "Prior to the ruling if an offender had four or more he or she was determined to be predatory," Hobold said.

"Then the parole board had to come up with a different way. What they decided they were going to do is move the score to six, which was considered high risk or above, and allows for an evidentiary hearing," she said.

On August 1, the parole board will introduce the new rules that allow for a predatory label and allows for the offender to dispute it by requesting a hearing.

Under the old rule, Hobold says the county has approximately 28 predatory offenders. All of which should be listed on the new site.

While the new site can be helpful, she reminds users that there are a few things to keep in mind.

“The problem with all sex offenders being on the same site, you do have people who were like 20 years old and had sex with their 17-year-old girlfriend,” Hobold said. “So some people may pull it up and be more alarmed when it’s not necessary.”

In addition, she says people need to be aware that most sex offenders are family or friends. “We did a study about four years ago and we found it was about 90 percent family or friends who were the offenders.”

So, while the website can be a useful tool, Hobold says ultimately people need to be cautious of the people in your life as well. “They need to be careful where their children are going after school, who their friends are and who their friends’ parents are as well,” she said.

Bend Weekly Newslink: <http://sexoffenders.oregon.gov/>

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