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For immediate release:
Thursday, October 11, 2012
Des Moines, Iowa

State Launches “Offender Watch” Notification Program

New service provides crime victims and public real-time offender location notifications through IowaSexOffender.com website

DES MOINES, Iowa --- Crime victims who want to know when a registered sex offender moves locations, or anyone who wants information on sex offenders moving into our out of designated areas, can now register for real-time notifications through a new addition to the state’s sex offender registry website.

The new option, called “Offender Watch,” enables crime victims and others to receive a confidential automatic notification via phone or text message of a registered sex offender’s change in residence when the offender notifies the state of the change. An email notification system has been available for several years. In fact, last fiscal year the sex offender website sent more than 280,000 email notifications to users on the movements and changes in relevant information made by offenders. The addition of the mobile notifications gives users the ability to stay with information as they move. “As technology changes, we strive to change with it,” says Division of Criminal Investigation Special Agent in Charge Terry Cowman.

Offender Watch also notifies users when a convicted sex offender moves in or out of an area defined by the user. Registered users can set up a “watch” using an address and a specified distance around that address. Users will receive text, voice, or email notices each time a registered sex offender moves into or out of that area, or moves to a new location within that area. Users may also create watches based on a city, county, zip code, or a specific registrant or group of registrants.



Sample text messages from “Offender Watch.”

“Offender Watch provides real-time information anonymously to crime victims, and to others, who want to know the minute a convicted sex offender notifies the state that he or she has moved to another address,” Attorney General Tom Miller said. “It also enables anyone to set up their own ‘watch’ area around any address, and they’ll get notified anytime a registered sex offender moves into our out of that user-defined area.”

“We think Offender Watch is a valuable addition to the sex offender registry and the registry’s

website,” said Division of Criminal Investigation Special Agent in Charge Terry Cowman. “But people shouldn’t rely on Offender Watch alone. Occasionally, some offenders don’t update their location as law requires, and occasionally they don’t tell us the truth about where they really live.”

The Iowa Sex Offender Registry was established by law in 1995. Anyone convicted or adjudicated of a criminal offense against a minor, sexual exploitation, or a sexually violent crime or who was on probation, parole, or work release status, or who was incarcerated on or after July 1, 1995 is required to register. Those who have received a deferred sentence or deferred judgment also must register, as must those with convictions from other jurisdictions, including convictions from other state courts or the federal courts.

Qualified offenders are required to verify their information in person at the sheriff’s office of their principal residence based on assigned tier levels, which can require in-person verifications from once a year to once every three months.

A first conviction for failing to comply is an aggravated misdemeanor; a second conviction for failing to comply is a class D felony. In addition, registrants convicted of failing to comply with Iowa Sex Offender Registry requirements are subject to an additional ten years of registration. If an offender is not complying with Iowa law and has moved to another jurisdiction and is not compliant in that jurisdiction, he/she may be subject to federal prosecution.

Currently, more than 5,700 convicted sex offenders are registered on the Iowa Sex Offender Registry. In fiscal year 2012, offenders registered more than 3,400 address changes.

To sign up for Offender Watch or learn more about the Iowa Sex Offender registry go to www.IowaSexOffender.com.

For additional questions, contact Special Agent in Charge Terry Cowman at 515-971-5690.

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To enroll in the DPS E-mail Notification system simply log on to <https://dpsemailnotify.iowa.gov> and follow the instructions to enroll as a new user