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ATTORNEY GENERAL MADIGAN OFFERS NEW INTERNET SAFETY INITIATIVE AS STUDENTS HEAD BACK TO SCHOOL

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, Microsoft, Best Buy, Geek Squad and Illinois Retailers Association Join Statewide, Education Campaign

Chicago – Attorney General Lisa Madigan is encouraging children and teens to follow seven key principles of Internet safety as part of a back-to-school effort to protect students from online dangers. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), the Illinois Retail Merchants Association (IRMA), Best Buy, the Geek Squad, and Microsoft joined the Attorney General at a Chicago area Best Buy store today to kick off a back-to-school collaborative initiative designed to reinforce the fundamentals of Internet safety. The initiative is part of the Attorney General's ongoing efforts to promote Internet safety education.

“Online safety is now an essential part of a child's education,” said Attorney General Madigan. “As the online environment continues to evolve, those of us who can take action to protect children – including law enforcement, teachers and parents – need to continue to improve our methods of teaching Internet safety so that our messages are clear and easy for students to follow.”

IRMA, Microsoft, Best Buy and Geek Squad have joined forces with the Attorney General's office to educate children on these seven key ways to stay safe online. The retailers will be distributing 20,000 mouse pads to students shopping for back-to-school supplies at Best Buy and other retail outlets statewide. The Attorney General's office also is distributing 25,000 school folders at Illinois State Fairs. The mouse pads and folders list the seven principles for online safety and include an eye-catching cartoon of a child being startled by a green, online, monster-like creature, representing the dangers that can lurk behind the computer screen.

The seven key principles of Internet Safety are:

- Never post personal information online;
- Don't put strangers on your buddy list;
- Don't post potentially embarrassing images of yourself online;
- Remember that anyone can read blogs;

- Communicate only with friends and family;
- Tell your parents if you receive anything that makes you feel uncomfortable; and
- “Think before you post” any information about yourself online.

“Think before you post” is a message that the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has been promoting for several years.

IRMA's partnership in the Back-to-School initiative adds the strength of distribution power of thousands of retail outlets throughout Illinois.

“We are delighted to help communicate the Attorney General's Internet safety message through the distribution of these mouse pads to our customers,” said David Vite, IRMA president and CEO. “Illinois retailers care about their customers and helping to make sure they have the information they need to be safe on the Internet is vitally important to the members of IRMA.”

“Microsoft recognizes that – in addition to safety tools provided by computer technology – Internet safety education is key,” observed Microsoft Associate General Counsel Becky Lenaburg. “Users, especially children, need to be constantly educated about how to stay safe online. We are excited to be a part of this unique partnership.”

Laura Bishop, director of government relations for Best Buy said, “We know that kids' reliance on the Internet for information and entertainment increases their vulnerability. Best Buy and Geek Squad have been educating families about the importance of online safety and security for years. And we know the job is never done. We commend Attorney General Madigan and our partners for their commitment to keeping the kids of Illinois safe.”

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children is also a partner in the initiative.

"The introduction of a statewide Internet safety campaign is an important tool in our arsenal to protect children from potential threats posed by Internet predators," said Ernie Allen, president and CEO of NCMEC. "Many of our children and teens are exposed to dangers online that can be avoided by empowering them with ways to stay safer. We enthusiastically join with the Illinois Attorney General in taking this step toward online safety, pledge our resources and applaud their effort to maximize the program through private, public and civic partnerships."

The back-to-school safety initiative is the Attorney General's latest Internet safety education initiative. In March, Madigan unveiled the Internet Safety Education Act, Senate Bill 1472, designed to encourage Illinois schools to adopt an age-appropriate Internet safety curriculum for

students in grades K through 12. This legislation identifies key topics for instruction, including safe and responsible use of the Internet, and the risks posed by online predators, identify theft, cyber-bullying and harassment, and illegal downloading. In May, Madigan joined with the Illinois State Alliance of YMCAs to announce a partnership to expand the reach of Internet safety education to include Y-Kids around the state. Just last month, Madigan

announced new training tools for law enforcement officials focusing on the potential problems caused by emerging social networking Web sites aimed at very young children, such as Club Penguin and Webkinz, which create the risk that children as young as six will begin to feel comfortable chatting with strangers online.

Along with these online safety education initiatives, the Attorney General's office, through a grant from the Department of Justice, operates the Illinois Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force (ICAC), one of 46 such task forces across the nation designed to investigate child exploitation crimes and deliver Internet safety education. In 2006, Illinois' ICAC officers arrested 66 child predators and trained 23,718 parents and children. Since January of 2007, the task force has conducted 25 training sessions attended by approximately 682 law enforcement officers and prosecutors, and has conducted 96 Internet safety presentations for approximately 14,000 parents, teachers and students.

For more information, click on:

<http://www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/children/safetytips.html> .

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