

WHAT IS “COMMUNITY NOTIFICATION”?

Community notification refers to laws that require local law enforcement to disclose to the public relevant information about certain convicted sex offenders upon their release from prison, work release, or another secure facility. Such information may include the sex offender's address, past crimes, description of offense for which the offender was convicted, physical description and/or photograph, and conditions of release.

Community notification laws are different from sex offender registration laws, which simply require convicted sex offenders who are living in the community to notify the police of where they are living.

HOW AND WHEN ARE COMMUNITIES NOTIFIED?

In Maine, notification of community members, as well as the extent of that notification, is determined by the law enforcement agency serving the particular community. The agency must notify those members of a community determined appropriate to ensure public safety. While there are minimum standards for law enforcement policies regarding such notification, to some extent jurisdictions in Maine may establish their own notification practices. Therefore, there may be variations of community notification practices from one geographic area to the next.

WHY AREN'T COMMUNITIES INFORMED OF ALL SEX OFFENDERS WHO ARE RELEASED FROM PRISON?

The intent of the community notification law is that the community receives information that is RELEVANT and NECESSARY to enhance its safety. Not all sex offenders pose a risk to all residents and knowing about every convicted sex offender does not necessarily enhance safety.

WHY ARE CONVICTED SEX OFFENDERS ALLOWED TO LIVE IN OUR COMMUNITY?

When sex offenders (or any person who has been convicted of a crime) have served their time in prison, they are free to live and work where they choose. Though this may be frustrating, it is a protection of constitutional rights. At the same time, though, some sex offenders may have some restrictions imposed if they are still under supervision, such as probation.

RESOURCES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS

**To report a crime against a child,
contact your local police department.**

To report suspected child abuse within a family, contact the Department of Health and Human Services at **1-800-452-1999**.

To get help and assistance, contact your local sexual assault support center's statewide, 24-hour, confidential support line at **1-800-871-7741**.

To view the registered sex offenders living in Maine visit the State of Maine Sex Offender Registry:
www.informe.org/sor/

Information contained in this brochure is designed to enhance public safety and awareness. However, no law can guarantee the protection of our children. There is no substitute for common safety precautions.

**A Guide for Communities, Organizations and Schools
about Community Notification of
Sex Offenders**

CONTACT YOUR LOCAL
SEXUAL ASSAULT SUPPORT CENTER
FOR MORE INFORMATION

**Statewide, 24-hour, confidential
sexual assault support line
1-800-871-7741**

TTY: 1-888-458-5599

For a link to one of Maine's
sexual assault support centers go to:
www.mecasa.org

A Guide for Communities, Organizations and Schools about COMMUNITY NOTIFICATION OF SEX OFFENDERS

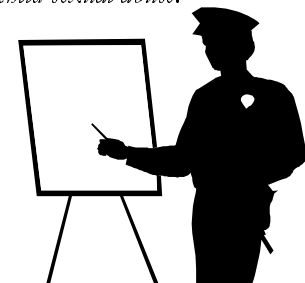
Information in this brochure is designed for:
State and local leaders, Citizens and Community Organizations

Knowledge that a convicted sex offender has moved into your neighborhood can be a frightening and overwhelming experience. It can also bring on an intense reaction from parents, neighbors, schools, and organizations in the community.

SOME OF THE MOST OFTEN ASKED QUESTIONS INCLUDE:

- * What does this mean?
- * How can this happen?
- * What do we tell our children?
- * How do we support our community and calm people's fears?
- * What are the roles and responsibilities of parents, communities, and schools?
- * What are the limits of community notification laws?
- * What resources are available to help me learn more about the notification process?

This brochure will address many of these questions and concerns. It will also provide suggestions on enhancing the safety of the community as well as information on prevention of child sexual abuse.



WHO ARE THE PERPETRATORS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

- Studies on who commits child sexual abuse vary in their findings, but the most common finding is that the majority of sexual offenders against children are not strangers but family members or someone the child knows.
- Research further shows that men are most often perpetrators, although there are cases in which women are also offenders.
- Despite a common myth, homosexual men are not more likely to sexually abuse children.

WHAT SHOULD WE TELL OUR CHILDREN IN THE COMMUNITY ABOUT THIS SEX OFFENDER WHO HAS MOVED INTO OUR NEIGHBORHOOD?

- Open communication between parents and children are vital components of personal safety. As a parent or other responsible adult who has become aware of the presence of a convicted sex offender, your first decision will be whether or not to tell the child of the sex offender and if so, what to tell the child.
- It is best not to share scary details about a specific case or offender. Rather, let your child know that the offender has hurt someone before and should be avoided. Tell your children to let you or another trusted adult know immediately if the offender approaches them or their friends. Keep information general, as this may protect them not only against the known offender but others who may try to harm them as well. In other words, it is most helpful if you talk about basic safety in general terms and about situations or actions rather than certain individuals.

NOW THAT THE COMMUNITY KNOWS THAT A SEX OFFENDER LIVES IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD, WHAT SHOULD WE DO DIFFERENTLY TO PROTECT OUR CHILDREN AND OURSELVES?

- Although it is alarming to be notified that a sex offender is living in your neighborhood, knowing of a specific offender generally does not assure safety. In fact, there are thousands of sex offenders living in Maine today and you may already be living near one of them. It is best to practice general safety strategies ALL THE TIME and learn to recognize potentially dangerous situations to protect yourself.

- While the new community notification law allows law enforcement to tell you about some sex offenders, this is not a guarantee of safety from sex offenses. It is important to know that sex offenders cannot be identified by looks, race, gender, or occupation. A sex offender can be anyone, so precautions need to be taken at all times. Open communication between parents and children are vital components of safety. Review safety tips, and be aware of common lures.
- Remember that community notification is not about chasing sex offenders out of our neighborhoods. Be attentive and report any violations or suspicious behavior the offender is engaged in, but DO NOT threaten, intimidate, or harass the offender. An offender who is put in a stressful state is more likely to relapse.

WHAT ARE WE AS CITIZENS PROHIBITED FROM DOING?

- Experts believe sex offenders are less likely to re-offend if they live and work in an environment free of harassment. Any actions taken against the individual named in the notification, including vandalism of property; verbal or written threats of harm; or physical violence against this person, his or her family, or employer, will result in arrest and prosecution of criminal acts.



AVAILABLE RESOURCES TO COMMUNITIES

Assistance and support are available to those communities in which a convicted sex offender has been or will soon be released. Among the forms of available assistance are:

FACILITATION OF COMMUNITY FORUMS

Multi-disciplinary panels are available to facilitate community meetings as a means to present sensitive information to the public. Typically, such meetings include an overview of the community notification laws and practices. Misinformation is countered and fears and concerns are addressed. Actions that citizens can take to enhance the safety of their community is emphasized. These panels generally consist of individuals from varied backgrounds which may include representatives from law enforcement, social services, clergy, and mental health, probation, sex offender treatment providers, and sexual assault advocates. For more information, call your local sexual assault support center.

CONSULTATION

Speakers and consultants from your local sexual assault support center in collaboration with law enforcement and other service providers are available to schools, churches, and other community organizations to help use notification as an opportunity to educate their communities.

This brochure was based on a brochure created by the Cumberland County Child Abuse and Neglect Council/ Youth Alternatives.