

Protect your children online

“e-copp” internet safety DVDs and workbooks created by local cops

By Marjorie Preston
Today's Family Correspondent

Northeast Ohio police officers Kevin Owens and Thomas Wetzel have created an affordable animated DVD and matching workbook to teach grade school-age children in a classroom setting how to be safe on the internet. The program is called “e-copp,” and its creators hope to bring internet safety to local teachers and schools regarding the dangers of email, chatting, instant messaging and viruses.

The program follows a group of cartoon kids as they encounter situations on the internet related to their interests. The kids have cute names like Lil Copper and DoubleClick. One child dressed as a carpenter is looking up blueprints and is asked to register personal information on the internet, for example. Another cartoon kid has received

an email attachment and other children warn the character of the potential dangers of opening it.

The program was the brainchild of local cop and computer forensic specialist Owens, who worked as an investigator on a special FBI task force from 2001-2003. During this time, he monitored websites and tracked people who promoted child pornography and molestation of children. Owens says, “It was daunting work, and it was during this time I first felt there should be an educational program on a massive scale to augment law enforcement.” He continues, “Every photo I had to look at was a photo of a kid at a crime scene, and there was no shortage of it.” Owens has been doing presentations to education students at John Carroll about the e-copp program and has also been interviewed on radio and television.

Parents know there are child predators on the internet looking at photos, but Owens makes it



clear that to keep your child from being abused by a predator, one has to take the child out of the equation. Owens says, “There is a crime triangle: the child, anonymity and opportunity. The molester needs all three of these legs of the triangle to support his damage.” He states, “Our goal is to kick out one of the legs of the triangle and take the child out of the situation.”

Owens encourages parents and teachers to visit www.e-copp.com to learn how to bring this important program to schools and community groups. In the meantime, Owens offers this tip to parents: “We advocate no online profiles with real information to websites or webcams.” He says, “No parent wants to think it could happen, but the parents whose kid this happened to also thought this.” Owens adds this warning to predators: “Nobody is truly anonymous – you can be found.”