

DAILY HAMPSHIRE GAZETTE

Police warn parents to be aware of Web use by children

By **BOB DUNN** @BDGazette – June 30, 2013

NORTHAMPTON — With summer here and children having more free time, police say parents should be more vigilant about how they are connecting to the Internet and pay attention to who it is they are connecting with.

To that end, members of area police departments and other law enforcement agencies took part in a three-day training on how to recover data from mobile devices for use in prosecuting child predators.

That training, conducted by SEARCH, a non-profit organization specializing in information management and sharing between law enforcement agencies and was hosted by the Northampton Police Department.

The bulk of the training, according to Northampton Police Detective Corey Robinson was to train law enforcement officers how to use software and hardware tools to extract data from mobile devices, including photos, video, and text messages to use as evidence in prosecuting child predators.

Robinson, a member of the state police's Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force said data from phones and mobile devices can be extracted using special tools, even if those images or messages were deleted from either the sender's or the recipient's device.

As more and more children have access to cell phones or other devices that connect to the Internet, predators are increasingly using those types of devices and the applications they carry to find their targets, Robinson said.

Even devices ostensibly for listening to music or playing games like iPods, or the Sony PS Vita easily connect to the Internet and use many of the most popular social networking applications like Facebook and Twitter and have built-in Internet browsers, providing access to most websites.

"Some parents are oblivious of the power kids have in their hands," Robinson said.

James Williams of SEARCH said most modern cell phones aren't really phones at all, but small computers with phone applications built-in.

Robinson and Williams both said the data collection techniques discussed at the training are done on devices that are seized via search warrant, subpoena or voluntarily turned over to investigators.

Even a relatively new service like Snapchat, which, by design, deletes images and messages a few seconds after the recipient opens them, can have that material retrieved, Robinson said.

Robinson said parents should always be aware of the capabilities of any device their child uses, what applications are stored on it and who they have in their main contact list and on the contact lists associated with each application, because some of them maintain contact registries separate from the phone's. Parents should ask children about any suspicious appearing screen names or contact listings of people they don't recognize.

Robinson recommends checking children's mobile devices frequently. "Be vigilant," he said.

Northampton Police Chief Russell P. Sienkiewicz said hosting the training at its new police station allows the department to save money by not having to pay for officers to travel to where it's being held and gives the department a break on the costs in return for providing the space.

Twenty-one people took the training, including officers from Amherst, Easthampton, the Department of Homeland Security, University of Massachusetts, South Hadley and Longmeadow.