



76 Arrested in Multi-State Child Exploitation Operation Named “Operation Southern Impact II”

A total of 76 people were arrested, and 13 children were rescued or identified as victims during a mutually coordinated operation between eight (8) southeastern states. The joint, proactive operation, Operation Southern Impact II, was coordinated by nine (9) Internet Crimes Against Children Task Forces in those eight states and focused on persons who possess and distribute child pornography and those who are sexually exploiting children in other ways using technology and the internet. The planning for Operation Southern Impact II began approximately 4 months ago and culminated in 2 days of investigative actions to include search warrant executions, undercover operations, and arrests in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia. A total of 222 law enforcement and prosecutorial agencies participated in the operation.

The arrestees, ranged in age from 17 to 73. Some of their occupations included postal worker, non-profit employee, small business owner, store clerk, mechanic, daycare administrator, pastor, construction worker and magician. During the operation, 136 search warrants were executed and 100 knock and talks were conducted in those eight (8) states. During those search warrants and knock and talks, 736 digital devices were previewed and 1,255 digital devices were seized. Of those devices seized 235 were mobile phones. These investigative actions resulted from both reactive cases such as cybertips received by each ICAC Task Force from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), and proactive cases such as peer-to-peer investigations and proactive, on-line undercover investigations.

During the course of the operation, some of the investigations extended to other states including Iowa, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee. Leads were sent to these additional states and their respective ICAC Task Forces followed up and assisted or developed their own investigations. The continued collaboration among the national network of ICAC Task Forces is one of the most successful partnerships in the history of law enforcement.

The 61 ICAC Task Forces across the country are working cases and conducting investigative actions like these every day. The Commanders of the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Forces in these states wanted to reinforce to those who exploit children that the ICAC Task Forces will work together to make an impact in their respective states and the region as a whole. The cooperation among agencies and among states illustrates their level of commitment to detect, arrest, and prosecute child predators.

Cooperation is always important in law enforcement, but it is never more important than when we set out to protect children. Operation Southern Impact II has given us an opportunity to share our experience, information, and resources across units, agencies, and state lines, to make sure that there is no safe place to hide for criminals who would victimize the most vulnerable among us.

The National ICAC Task Force Program consists of over 4,000 local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, other related criminal justice agencies and prosecutor's offices. The mission of the ICAC Task Force, created by the U. S. Department of Justice, is to assist state and local law enforcement agencies in developing an effective response to cyber enticement and child pornography cases. This support encompasses forensic and investigative components, training and technical assistance, victim services, prevention and community education. The ICAC Program was developed in response to the increasing number of children and teenagers using the internet, the proliferation of child pornography, and the heightened online activity by predators searching for unsupervised contact with underage victims. By helping state and local law enforcement agencies develop effective and sustainable responses to online child victimization and child pornography, the ICAC program delivers national resources at the local level.

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