

ICAC warning parents about online gaming

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SALT LAKE CITY -- A federal judge sentenced a California man Monday to 10 years in prison for luring a Utah girl into a sexual relationship through online gaming. Now investigators want to warn parents about these games becoming forums for child predators.

Children playing the online games are quickly becoming targets for pedophiles. Luckily, in this case, police stopped the 13-year-old girl before she met up with her predator, but others may not be so fortunate.

More than 11 million play World of Warcraft online. A year ago, Robert Lavern Davison met the girl through that game, and the two started instant messaging.

"This was a 13-year-old girl who was lured in by this guy and the lies he told her on the Internet. And he had bought her a bus ticket. She was on her way to California to live with him," said Assistant U.S. Attorney Trina Higgins.

Law enforcement officers stopped her at a bus stop last November.

According to the Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) task force, this type of crime is becoming more common.

"As this stuff gets cheaper, as it becomes more available, more kids have access to it," said ICAC educator Sariah Donnahoo. "So, I think that's why we might be seeing more cases, because there's just a bigger population playing games nowadays."

Agents believe pedophiles have moved on from chat rooms to gaming because more kids are there.

"[They're] anywhere where there's going to be children present. So, online games is a big one because there's male and female participants that enjoy any type of game," Donnahoo said.

Two years ago, the task force delved into online gaming -- training agents to go undercover as child gamers. The project only lasted six months.

"The amount of time we were putting into it versus the amount of cases we were able to work from it, it just wasn't as productive as we were able to do in other areas," Donnahoo explained.

Now, ICAC says preventing these crimes starts with parenting -- asking your children questions and monitoring their online activities.

"Hey who are you talking to? You're not telling them your name. You're not even telling them if

you're male or female," Donnahoo gave as examples.

"I mean, be that specific with them," Donnahoo said. "Hold back any kind of identifying information."

Now the task force says it dedicates a lot of time to watching people who download hours of child pornography. Officers say those people are often the same people who seek out children through gaming and social networks.