

May 20, 2003- Focus on Safety and Preparedness for National Missing Children's Day

May 20, 2003 SANCHEZ ADVISES CALIFORNIA PARENTS TO FOCUS ON SAFETY AND PREPAREDNESS THIS NATIONAL MISSING CHILDREN'S DAY

Although Abduction Rates Show No Increase, New Survey Shows Parents' Concerns Have Grown and Many Are Not Prepared

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- As the nation observes National Missing Children's Day this week, Rep. Loretta Sanchez encouraged California parents to focus on safety and preparedness. Sanchez also pointed to new survey results released this week by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) and ADVO, Inc., which showed that 68 percent of parents have reviewed safety precautions with their children in the month prior to responding to the survey, an increase over 2002 data. At the same time, 85 percent of parents have established a plan of action with their children should they be abducted, up from 78 percent in 2002.

"While the survey shows parents are actively reviewing safety precautions with their children, not all parents have the information often critical to recovering children when abductions occur," said Sanchez, a long-time children's advocate and member of the Congressional Missing & Exploited Children's Caucus.

According to law enforcement officials, information such as height, weight, eye color and a recent photograph are essential when searching for a missing child. By contrast, the NCMEC/ADVO survey showed that, overall, 23 percent of parents do not know the height, weight and eye color for all of their children. For households with two or more children, 29 percent do not have all of their children's height, weight and eye color information readily available.

Talking Safety

NCMEC says that the single most important measure parents can take is to regularly talk to children about safety issues. Results of the survey also showed that, of those parents who do review safety precautions, 81 percent say they do so on a monthly basis. Additionally, 79 percent of all parents said schools should take a more active role in child safety training.

At the same time, 80 percent of parents whose children use the Internet are very concerned (46 percent) or somewhat concerned (34 percent) about their child's safety online. Ninety-four percent of parents surveyed have taught their children not to share personal information over the Web. At the same time, however, 28 percent of parents surveyed do not know their children's Internet codes or passwords, and 43 percent of parents do not use Web site blocking software.

"Because the Internet provides virtual anonymity, it is frequently used by predators to lure unsuspecting children of all ages," said Ernie Allen, president and CEO of NCMEC. "Since March 1998, we have received more than 120,000 online enticement reports to our online CyberTipline. Our website, located at www.missingkids.com, also offers important information to help parents become better informed about the safety measures they can take to protect their children."

Additionally, fifty-four percent of parents surveyed said their level of concern that their child or children may be abducted or exploited has increased over the last year. Forty-three percent of parents surveyed said their level of concern has remained the same, while only three percent said their concern has decreased.

NCMEC officials have concluded that parents might be reacting to the number of high-profile child abductions that have occurred over the last 12 months, but that statistics do not indicate there has been an increase in child abductions. However, NCMEC says that increased attention to the issue might be helping over time.

"We hope that the increased public attention paid to missing and exploited children during the past year might positively impact the rate of recoveries going forward and continue to drive our nation's legislative and law enforcement response to this issue," said Allen. "Since 1984 NCMEC has worked over 89,000 cases of missing children and helped recover over 73,000 children. Our current recovery rate is 94%, up from 62% in 1990. This increase in recovery rate can be attributed in part to the public's increased awareness and vigilance regarding this issue."