

## **Danger stalks cyber space**

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CYBER stalking and harassment are on the increase and many users are unaware of the dangers online, says a man who works to keep the internet safe.

Police officer Peter Sweetlove, who works as a volunteer for cyber policing group CyberAngels, has told of many situations he has had to deal with including cases involving stalkers, sexual predators, child abuse and cyber revenge.

Mr Sweetlove, a police officer based at New Norfolk, said yesterday cyber stalking and harassment could have an enormous impact on people's lives.

"It can ruin people's entire life, the internet can be a very dangerous place," he said.

He has received many messages from distressed cyber users including:

- Parents who wanted help after finding that their 15-year-old daughter was being groomed by a sexual predator.
- A woman whose former boyfriend had posted her image and false details on an adult dating site.
- Parents who found that a 48-year-old man was sending naked pictures to their under-age daughter.
- A case of suspected child abuse where an eight-year-old child was being treated like an animal.
- A woman who had been tracked down by an internet stalker who then threatened to kill her husband and verbally abused her in public.
- A man who became the victim of stalking after playing poker online.
- A 14-year-old girl seeking help after a man had sent pornographic pictures of himself to her.
- A victim whose cyber identity had been stolen from a Yahoo online account.

In an Australian case, Mr Sweetlove worked on a man who posted notices about a woman on the internet saying she was a prostitute.

"If a male is angry he will post absolutely horrible things about a woman -- her personal details, photographs -- and even sign them up for sex sites," he said.

Mr Sweetlove can receive up to five cases a day leading him to suspect that many home computer users aren't aware of internet dangers.

He says the most important piece of advice he gives internet users is never to post anything which could identify them.

"You should always remain anonymous by using a pseudonym. Never log into chat rooms, blogs or anything you have to sign into with your main email address," he said.

"If you want to be involved in that type of internet activity get yourself a second throwaway email address with a pseudonym.

"And always supervise your children very closely when they are using the internet. One of the things I would like to see happen is education for children and parents at school on how to keep safe on the internet.

"I'm hoping that CyberAngels will be able to do something about this in the near future by supplying something like a booklet either to schools or parents detailing how this can be achieved."