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Protecting your children: The other side of Halloween

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UTICA, N.Y. (WKTV) - Local law enforcement were busy on Halloween night, patrolling the streets to make sure trick-or-treaters were safe from predators. NewsChannel 2 got the chance to ride along with two State of New York Parole Officers who showed their "Operation Halloween 2013" duties, of visiting local sex offenders, making sure they are compliant with the Halloween conditions. One of those offenders willingly opened up about his troubled past.

From the time kids get out of school until the early hours of the morning, multiple parole officers are monitoring the streets and making unannounced house calls to area sex offenders. Oneida County and Utica have five parole officers on duty and each officer has approximately 25 cases. There is also an additional 20 plus parole officers who cover the rest of the community, enforcing "Operation Halloween 2013."

Gina Orsaio, a parole officer said, " Kids enjoy going out seeing what kind of candy they get... To empty the bag when they get home and pick out their favorites of what they don't like and trade off with their brother or sister and its a good feeling to know they made it home safely and no one bothered them."

The officers look for certain things as they approach a sex offenders home. The offender is not allowed any Halloween decorations, no candy and they must stay inside at all times from 3 p.m. until the following morning, "We're first looking to see they are home... but were looking for anything related to Halloween that's the whole idea of the operation. We do another double check of DVDs and books to make sure nothing is related to children." The parole officers also make sure no alcohol or drugs are inside the sex offenders homes.

Many offenders post a sign on their homes, provided by the city. The title: " No Candy

At This Residence." The signs purpose is to warn trick-or-treaters not to stop at that particular house. Although the sign is advised, it is not required and not every sex offender uses it.

One local sex offender had no problem telling his story on camera, a story too graphic for words. When asked why he was willing to talk he said, "Why not... If you want to change basically that's up to you you have to get this straight first," he said as he pointed to his head.

Besides going door to door the parole officers have some high tech help. Orsaio said while pointing to the monitor worn on the offenders ankle, " This is a GPS monitor some of our guys or girls do wear this monitor and what it does is help us track offenders 24 hours a day. So when we leave here this evening we will be able to monitor him throughout the night and have 24 hour access."

Offenders are required to stay in their homes until the day after Halloween. If they aren't accounted for when an officer stops by or have not complied to the rules they are immediately taken into custody, a warrant is issued and they are taken to jail.

The officers may visit the parolees multiple times a night, especially if the individual is considered a level three sex offender.

Most offenders comply with the program. Last year out of 619 offenders in the entire Central New York region only two were taken into custody.

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