



Today Sheriff Tom Thompson and the Mercer County Sheriff's Department launched a new sex offender registration and public notification website called ***OffenderWatch***®. Mercer County will now be part of a nationwide network of over 5,000 law enforcement agencies which includes over half of the Illinois county sheriff's offices and police departments. The new service is a citizen-friendly, easy to use website that enables citizens to search for potentially dangerous sex offenders and predators which may be in close proximity to their homes, places of work, schools, churches and day care centers. The information is available 24 hours a day 7 days a week and is updated in real time by the Mercer County Sheriff's Office as offender information changes and is reported. As part of this new, innovative service, citizens may enter any address of interest to them, and see a map and listing of all offenders within a *user defined radius* (of .25 miles out to 2 miles) of that address. Citizens can then register the address to be continuously monitored by the Sheriff, who will send to them an email alerting them if an offender or predator should register an address within their specified radius of their address. Citizens may confidentially register as many addresses as they like, at no cost to them. ***"Citizens have a right to know who may be living near them and could potentially pose a threat to their families. The Illinois sheriffs have the most up to date information on all offenders registered in the state and I am happy to be able to provide that information to them"*** says Sheriff Thompson. The sheriff has also made available additional web based resources designed to educate and inform the public on ways to keep their families safe. The purpose of the program is to lessen the anxiety of citizens by proactively alerting them should an offender/predator move within proximity to them, and to provide the highest level of security and safety to all Mercer County citizens. The program also enables the Sheriff to verify that offender addresses do not violate any **safety buffers** that may be implemented around protected institutions in the county, such as schools, day cares and parks, and helps law enforcement schedule compliance checks for verifying information provided by offenders. With Halloween rapidly approaching, this is a wonderful resource for parents to know which houses are safe and which should be avoided while trick or treating. Citizens can access the ***OffenderWatch***® registry at the Mercer County Sheriff's Office ***OffenderWatch***® web page accessed at: <http://www.sheriffalerts.com/il/Mercer/>