

Police forces across the region are warning those who view sexually explicit images of children that they will be caught.

The warning comes after officers from Staffordshire, Warwickshire, West Mercia and West Midlands were out this morning (Thurs) targeting offenders as part of a successful day of action.

Under the banner of Operation Safenet, the teams carried out warrants at a number of addresses across the region.

Three warrants were executed in Staffordshire resulting in three arrests.

A 55-year-old from Stafford; a 52-year-old from Stone and a 30-year-old from Fenton, Stoke-on-Trent, were all arrested on suspicion of distributing indecent images of children. They have been taken into custody for questioning.

Two men, aged 25 and 39, were arrested in Coventry in the West Midlands on suspicion of possession of indecent images.

One arrest has taken place in Telford (Warwickshire and West Mercia). A 62-year-old was arrested on suspicion of possession of indecent images.

The regionally adopted operation aims to safeguard children by detecting abuse and prosecuting offenders for the possession and distribution of indecent images of children.

This approach was pioneered in Staffordshire during the summer of 2015 before being launched across the other three forces earlier this year. It brings together police officers and highly skilled digital forensics staff to proactively seek out those using the internet to view and exchange these images.

Each week the teams use the latest digital investigative techniques to identify where illegal images are being viewed, then using this intelligence apply to a magistrate for a search warrant, to allow the police and digital forensic experts to raid the home to seize evidence and arrest those involved.

Since it was launched in across the region, the teams have carried out 593 investigations, arrested 353 people for sexual offences and safeguarded 491 children.

DS Steve Chadwick, Operation Safenet lead for Staffordshire Police, said: "We have done something special with Operation Safenet. Using the latest mobile based technology we set up a digital forensics laboratory in the home of the suspect and examine the computers, mobiles, tables and data storage devices within minutes. The forensics staff work with the police officers in the address to immediately secure evidence for a prosecution and help build the case so a quick decision can be made in terms of charges and putting the suspect before the courts.

“This triage approach to the evidence means we can immediately take action to prevent further offences and importantly take action to protect any children at risk.

“I want those using such images to really think about their actions, often they think there isn’t a victim because they might not have any direct contact with the children in the images, but those children are victims of abuse and were abused to make those images. With colleagues across the region, we will continue to tackle this issue and take enforcement action to protect children until we know children are safe.”

## **MEDIA NOTES:**

Operation Safenet teams run within each force throughout the region to manage and reduce the threat, risk and harm posed by online child abuse and they are supported by police staff experts in digital forensics.

Working closely with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), the team use an internationally recognised system to gather intelligence we are already achieve a far faster charging decision, often within four weeks of conducting the raid the suspect appears in court.

[Regional interview opportunities here](#)

Since it was launched in Staffordshire the team have carried out 332 investigations with 151 warrants, arrested 134 people and safeguarded 210 children. The team’s work has also led to 93 people being charged and going through the court process or been convicted of sexual offences.

And following the same positive approach, West Midland’s officers have carried out 117 warrants, arrested 100 people and safeguarded 91 children.

Officers from Warwickshire and West Mercia have carried out 144 investigations with 119 people arrested and 27 charged. They have safeguarded 190 children.

More detail on each force’s approach to Operation Safenet can be found on their websites.

## **Definition of Child Sexual Exploitation.**

‘Sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive ‘something’ (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities.

Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition; for example being persuaded to post sexual images on the Internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain.

In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources.

Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability.'