

Megan's Law computer available

Residents can check by name, zip

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CHINO HILLS — Residents of Chino Hills now have the tool to confirm their suspicions of a possible sex offender in their neighborhood.

The Megan's Law computer system, provided by the California Department of Justice, was installed at the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department at the Chino Hills station this month.

"They move around to different places," said Detective Shelby Gaul from the Chino Hills Sheriff's Station. "This is basically so that if one of them lives close to you, you allow your kids to keep away from them. I can run them by name or by zip code. It will give me a list of all of them."

The system began operation Jan. 13 and is one of 17 set up at sheriff's stations throughout the county. The Megan's Law terminals are available to anyone over 18 except sex offenders or those who have a criminal record, Gaul said.

A background check is done on people wanting to use the system. After they are cleared to use it, a staff member will log them into the system.

Users may take notes about the offender they are looking for. The information acquired through the system cannot be used against the offender, Gaul said.

"You can't use this information to go after these people," Gaul said. "If you know somebody and you are suspicious they might have done something, you can come down here and verify your suspicions."

The system will provide a photo of the sex offender if one is on file, their names, aliases, date of birth and other descriptive information.

A total of 47 sex offenders are registered in Chino Hills. Two of those have not been located in the city or have not registered again, said Gaul.

Only one of the sex offenders in the city is a woman, Gaul said.

The system will offer an added service that was not available to the average person, said Lt. Larry Swope of the Chino Hills Sheriff's Station.

"I think it's a very positive piece of equipment for the community," Swope said. "It solves a lot of questions that may be asked of us to check on somebody. Legally we couldn't check on that. Now the individuals can go check."

As a parent and a member of the Chino Valley Unified School District, David Black said this will be a very useful tool for parents.

"To me it's another tool we have as parents to try and improve the safety of our children," Black said.

Black, of Chino Hills, said the system will help investigate a rumor more quickly and help prevent false rumors.

"There was a rumor about an individual that we had been associated with and if we had this tool I would have used it," Black said. "It took a lot more effort to find out. Having a tool like this helps me find out in a rapid manner if I should be concerned."