

Monthly Columns

by Attorney General Jack Conway



January 2009

For the second time in just six months, Mother Nature has again tested our resolve. The destructive winds that swept across Kentucky in September have been replaced by snow, ice and bitter cold. Although very different storms; the end result is much the same. A record number of Kentucky families are again without power, homes are damaged, lives have been lost and Kentucky is in a state of emergency. My thoughts and prayers are with the more than 600,000 families who lost power in the wake of this devastating winter storm.

It is during times of natural disaster that we see both the best and worst in people. In September, I was reminded time and again of what it truly means to be a Kentuckian; neighbors helping one another and strangers coming to the aid of those in need. However, we were also reminded that there are people who seek to profit while others suffer.

That is why Governor Beshear and I have again acted quickly to ensure that those who have fallen victim to the winter storm will not be victimized a second time by storm related price-gouging.

On January 28, one day after Governor Beshear signed an executive order declaring a state of emergency, I asked him for an emergency order that would also implement Kentucky's price-gouging laws. These consumer protection measures will remain in

place for 30 days and allow me to investigate and prosecute, where appropriate, those who sell gasoline, generators, building supplies, hotel rooms, kerosene, and other necessary goods and services at an exorbitant price in a time of emergency.

I would encourage consumers to be our eyes and ears throughout the Commonwealth. If you see evidence of price-gouging, please send digital photos or scanned receipts to icestormcomplaints@ag.ky.gov. You may also call our consumer protection hotline at 1-888-432-9257.

Be assured there are consequences for those who attempt to profit during emergencies. Earlier this month, my office issued fines totaling more than \$108,000 against eight retail gas stations for alleged price-gouging following Hurricane Ike and the subsequent windstorm.

I also want to warn residents about unscrupulous contractors who may attempt to prey on storm victims. Always be wary of "storm chasers". Storm chasers are contractors who travel across the country to communities who've been affected by inclement weather. It is always best to work with contractors who you know and trust. If you have questions about the legitimacy of a contractor, you may contact your local Better Business Bureau or our Consumer Protection Division.

Support Cybersafety Legislation

In addition to weather emergencies, we are also focused on the legislative session here in Frankfort. During this session, I hope you will join me in fighting for a comprehensive cybersafety law.

Far too many parents still have a false sense of security when it comes to the Internet and their children. The Internet is a wonderful tool, but it can also be a tool for crime - especially for those who wish to prey on Kentucky kids.

When I was a teenager, my father would drop me off at the mall with the warning, "you're known by who you run with, and I'll be watching." Today, Facebook and MySpace are the new malls, and it is far more challenging for parents to keep a watchful eye on their children in this new virtual world.

One in seven youths ages 10-17 report receiving unwanted sexual advances while online. Thirty percent of those online advances involve attempts to make contact offline and only 25% of solicitations are reported to adults or law enforcement.

Through my cybersafety presentations, I've been able to talk to more than 14,000 Kentucky children and adults over the past year about the dangers that exist online. I've also listened to parents and law enforcement; it's clear that the time has come to bring

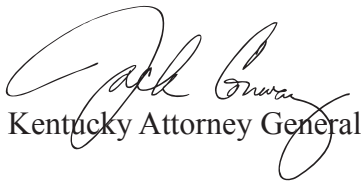
Kentucky law up to date with changes in technology.

In the coming weeks, I will introduce cybercrimes legislation that will strengthen Kentucky laws and better protect our children from the threat of online predators.

What will my bill do?

- Will make online solicitation of a minor a Class D felony.
- Amends Kentucky's stalking statute (KRS 508.130-150) to include cyberstalking.
- Clarifies that it is a crime to transmit sexually explicit images to a child via the Internet.
- Prohibits Kentucky registered sex offenders from using social-networking sites used by minors.
- Will require sex offenders to register changes in email addresses.
- Creates a searchable database of registered sex offender email addresses and online identifiers.

I believe my proposed legislation will address many of the modern law enforcement challenges we face. More importantly, it will better protect children in every corner of the Commonwealth. Please join me in calling your representatives and senators to support this important legislation.



Jack Conway
Kentucky Attorney General