



**U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement**

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# News Release

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## **Salida grade school janitor arrested on Internet child pornography charges**

FRESNO, Calif. – An elementary school janitor will make his initial appearance in federal court here this afternoon on charges of possessing and receiving child pornography over the Internet following an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Stanislaus County Sheriff's Department.

Rick Vandenakker, 38, was arrested yesterday afternoon at Sisk Elementary School in Salida, Calif., where he has worked for the last 19 years as a custodian. Vandenakker is charged in a criminal complaint with one count of receiving child pornography and one count of possession of child pornography. The receipt of child pornography carries a mandatory minimum sentence of five years in prison and maximum sentence of up to 20 years. Possession of child pornography carries a possible 10-year prison term.

ICE agents and Stanislaus County Sheriff's deputies executed a search warrant at Vandenakker's Salida home yesterday seizing two computer hard drives, a laptop computer, and a memory card. A preliminary analysis of those items identified more than 600 pornographic still and video images of children, some of whom appeared to be under ten years of age.

The leads in the case stem from an ICE-led international child pornography investigation. Agents say the images recovered so far appear to have been obtained over the Internet and there is no evidence that any of the children in those images are from the local area. Officials with the Salida Union School District emphasize that the charges against Vandenakker involve his home computer, not the use of school equipment.

"This case is particularly troubling because of the suspect's longstanding contact with young people," said Rick Eaton, the assistant special agent in charge of the ICE office of investigations in Sacramento. "ICE will continue to work closely with its local law enforcement partners to investigate those who prey upon and sexually exploit our children."

"The safety of our children is one of our highest priorities," said Adam Christianson, Stanislaus County Sheriff. "We were happy to assist ICE with the arrest of a suspect in possession of child pornography."

The charges against Vandenakker are the result of Operation Predator, an ongoing ICE initiative to identify, investigate, and arrest those who prey on children, and the U.S. Department of Justice's Project Safe Childhood (PSC). Since ICE launched Operation Predator in July of 2003, the agency has arrested more than 10,000 sex offenders nationwide, including more than 2,300 in California.

Additional information about Operation Predator is available on the Web at [www.ice.gov](http://www.ice.gov). ICE encourages the reporting of suspected child predators through its toll-free hotline at 1-866-DHS-2ICE. This hotline is staffed around the clock by investigators. Suspected child sexual exploitation or missing children may be reported to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, an Operation Predator partner, at 1-800-843-5678 or <http://www.cybertipline.com>.

Project Safe Childhood was launched to increase federal prosecutions of violent sexual predators of children, and to reduce the number of Internet crimes against children including child pornography trafficking. As a part of PSC, the United States Attorney's Office has teamed with state and local agencies and organizations to increase law enforcement presence on the Internet, and to educate the public about safe Internet use, thereby reducing the risk that children might fall prey to online sexual predators. For additional information on the PSC initiative, please go to [www.projectsafechildhood.gov](http://www.projectsafechildhood.gov) or call the United States Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of California and ask to speak with the PSC coordinator.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*