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Indiana sex offender registry full of inaccuracies

By The Associated Press
Posted April 21, 2012 at 10:06 a.m.

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INDIANAPOLIS — Inaccuracies in Indiana's online sex offender registry that show offenders living in places that no longer exist or include outdated information undermine the registry's purpose and make it difficult to protect the public from [sexual predators](#), state lawmakers and national experts say.

But fixing the registry won't be easy. No statewide entity is responsible for overseeing accuracy, and though the Indiana Sheriffs' Association provides general guidelines, the state's 92 counties are responsible for entering and updating information, The Indianapolis Star reported (<http://bit.ly/zRpGDa>).

As a result, the registry lists a convicted rapist as living at what is now a vacant lot and shows [offenders](#) at addresses that now house day-care centers or are years outdated because the offenders are in jail, the newspaper found.

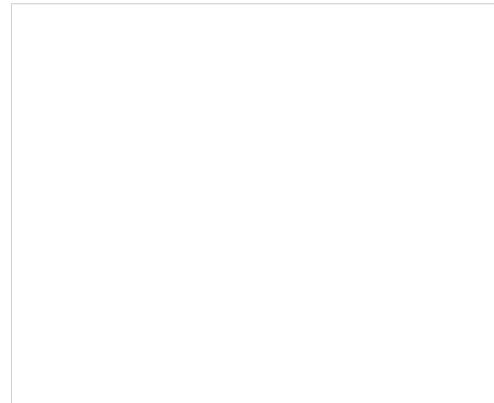
Officials acknowledge the inaccuracies are problematic.

"We don't want somebody that would have a hostile attitude toward these kinds of people thinking that there was a sex offender living there and harassing them," said Lt. Robert Hanna of the Marion County Sheriff's Department, which administers the county's published [list of sex offenders](#).

Efforts to correct the registry, however, have been stymied by the state Supreme Court's decision nearly three years ago to create a group known as "Wallace offenders."

The term was coined after Richard P. Wallace was convicted in 1989, before the registry existed. The justices ruled unanimously that putting him on the registry was retroactive punishment and unconstitutional.

Hundreds of other offenders are in similar situations, including in Marion County, where about 20 percent of those on the registry are considered Wallace offenders. They no longer have to update their information when they move, yet their names remain on the registry because they often fail to petition the courts to be removed.



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Carolyn Atwell-Davis, director of legislative affairs at the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, said the inaccuracies were troubling.

"The value of the public registry as a child protection tool is that the information is accurate," she said.

State lawmakers say an outdated registry is no better at preventing crime than a weapon that won't shoot straight.

"You wouldn't rely on a gun that wasn't accurate, would you?" said Sen. Brent Steele, R-Bedford.

Hanna said he plans to ask the registry's information technology people to see whether they can fix the mapping inaccuracies but said officials made a conscious decision to keep the names of Wallace offenders on the public registry.

"If they want their name and face removed from the registry," Hanna said, "they can go to court and obtain the necessary order to get that done."

Not every county has taken the same approach. Allen County removes all of its Wallace offenders from its portion of the state registry.

"We're certainly not going to publish an address that's wrong," said Detective Cpl. Mike Smothermon of the Allen County Sheriff's Department, "or an offense that doesn't require [registration](#)."

Smothermon said Allen County doesn't keep Wallace offenders on the registry in part because it would be "doing the general public a very big disservice by publishing an address that you're not verifying."

In Vanderburgh County, offender registration coordinator Mike Robinson said he lacks the resources to figure out who qualifies as a Wallace offender, much less remove their names or addresses.

"It would be a total monopolization of my time," he said.

State lawmakers plan to meet this summer to discuss ways to make the registry more consistent from county to county. A bill that passed the House unanimously this past session was aimed at preventing counties from removing people from the registry, said Rep. Tom Dermody, R-LaPorte.

Dermody said he worried that if Indiana took offenders off the registry, the state would become a "welcoming ground" for similar offenders from other states.

The bill failed in a Senate committee.

Steele, the committee's chairman, said he worries that the registry one day will be clogged with so many offenders and so much outdated information that users will become overwhelmed and "quit using it."

"And then," Steele said, "we've defeated our purpose."



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April 21, 2012
10:45 a.m.

[gollygeeandy](#) writes:

Just another case of state computer systems "misplacing" items and persons. What is the big State of Indiana misplacement count up to now? Around a HALF BILLION DOLLARS! And they are expected to keep track of people that probably do not want to be kept track of? NOT going to ever happen.

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There needs to be a registry for all persons convicted of infractions. From DUI to Murder. Politicians should not be exempted from the lists.

April 21, 2012
12:06 p.m.

[mooseknuckles](#) writes:

There's no point in starting a registry for every infraction. We already have something called "public records" that does its job. According to many other articles, the sex offender registry doesn't do its job either. It's just a waste of time and money. If parents stay involved in their kids' lives, like they should, they should have no worries. But there are tons of lazy parents that put their kids low on their priority list and that's when things happen.

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April 22, 2012
3:45 p.m.

[Panopticon](#) writes:

The Indiana Supreme Court ruled that so-called "Wallace offenders" should not be on the registry, so they should be removed from the registry. It's absurd to keep these people, who don't have to be on the registry, on the registry anyway with likely inaccurate information.

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We shouldn't be keeping a registry of sex offenders anyway. If a person is truly dangerous enough to warrant this kind of treatment, then he's dangerous enough to have had a longer sentence, but a good number of people on the sex offender registry are not particularly dangerous.

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