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Government and hotel association partner to combat sexual exploitation of children

Campaign empowers industry staff to help protect children and youth

Lake Louise... Together, we can help protect children and youth from a life of sexual abuse. That's the message the Alberta government and the Alberta Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA) are sending to hotel and lodging owners, operators and staff through a new joint education campaign.

"The face of child sexual exploitation has changed," said Janis Tarchuk, Minister of Children and Youth Services. "With new technology and predator tactics, child sexual exploitation has increasingly moved away from the street and is happening behind closed doors. We need to work to prevent this horrific abuse wherever it is happening, and we are taking steps to do just that in partnership with the Alberta Hotel and Lodging Association."

Child sexual exploitation occurs when a child under 18 is involved in a sexual act in exchange for money, food, shelter, or any other consideration. Perpetrators may use hotels and motels to carry out this type of child abuse without the knowledge of the owners, managers or staff. The new campaign provides accommodation industry staff with information about child sexual exploitation, the signs to watch for, and what to do if they see something suspicious - talk to their supervisors and report it to Children and Youth Services or to the local police.

"The AHLA is pleased to work with Alberta Children and Youth Services to educate our members and their staff about this issue," said Doug Shandro, Board Chair of the AHLA. "Our members must be made aware of the possibility that their properties could be used for exploitation of children. This campaign will give the people who work in our industry the information and tools they need to prevent this kind of child abuse in hotels and motels."

Over the past four years, Children and Youth Services has developed campaigns to address sexual exploitation in Alberta by focusing on Internet safety and Internet luring. In 2008-09, the campaign shifted focus toward addressing "underground" child sexual exploitation, to raise awareness of the issue within industries that are most likely to come into contact with this activity.

The current campaign was launched by Minister Tarchuk and AHLA Board Chair Shandro April 6 at the AHLA's annual convention in Lake Louise. To view the educational materials and find out more about child sexual exploitation, visit www.child.alberta.ca.

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