

## State Cracks Down on Professionals with Sex Offenses

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By Larry Yellen, FOX Chicago News

Edward Kent was a north suburban realtor. There's a picture of him on a company website, where he says he had a "track record of success."

But there's another picture of Edward Kent. This one describing his track record of crime.

It's from the state's sex offender registration website.

Last March, Kent pleaded guilty to possession of child pornography.

He never went to prison. He received thirty months probation. And we've learned it wasn't until last week that he lost his real estate license because of the crime.

Daniel Bluthardt, the state's Director of Professional Regulation, recently matched the names of everyone licensed by his department against the state's list of registered sex offenders. He says so far he's found nearly 600 cases where a licensee's sex crimes should prevent them from holding or renewing their licenses.

Bluthardt said, "What we're shooting for is to try to make sure that our licensees, that somebody who has a license granted by the state, has the integrity to keep that license."

Among the sex offenders found with state licenses were nurses, pharmacy technicians, security guards, barbers and even a massage therapist.

Some, like pharmacist Steven Snyder, are still serving time, but never had their state license revoked when they went to prison. Since others like Edward Kent never ended up behind bars, he could have legally continue selling real estate.

State Representative John Fritchey, who sits on the state panel which oversees licensing, says the public should be concerned that licensees who might have access to homes, such as realtors, could be convicted sex offenders.

Rep. Fritchey, a Chicago democrat, said, "When you realize that that person has the key to your house, and they may be in your home when you're not there, they maybe can place a hidden camera. Whatever it may be, there's a real concern there."

Right now, under state law, only massage therapists are forbidden from getting licensed when they've got a sex offender conviction. But in recent weeks, the state's been taking

action against those other professionals by claiming they behaved in an unprofessional manner or concealed a felony conviction.

Becky Palmer, who has counseled sex offenders, and victims, for two decades, says the state should focus on identifying sex offenders before they ever get licensed, especially for some jobs.

"I would say it's more the professions who have ready, frequent access to children," Palmer said. "Nurses, respiratory therapists who work in childrens' hospitals."

Edward Kent did not return my call. The computer cross-checks which discovered his license and hundreds of others will now continue on a regular basis.

"Our duty is to protect the public," said Bluthardt, "and we see this as one tool to accomplish that goal."