Law Enforcement Alert

While the dangers of people being preoccupied with their cell phone will not be new to law enforcement, Pokémon Go intensifies traditional problems with distracted drivers and pedestrians, or children becoming lost. Technological change also provides criminals with new ways to commit traditional crimes (e.g. kidnapping, assault, sexual assault, and armed robbery).
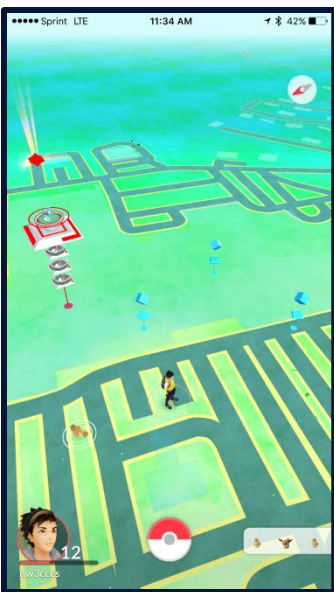
What is Pokémon Go?

Figure 1

Pokémon Go is an Augmented Reality (AR) game that lets players attempt to capture small cartoon-style characters ("pocket monsters", or Pokémon), using the real world as an interactive game board. The game is a result of a partnership between Nintendo, The Pokémon Company, Google, and Niantic Inc.

Pokémon Go is available as a free app on both iOS and Android devices, but offers in-app purchases of items to give players advantages during the game. In the United States, more than 15 million iOS and Android users have downloaded Pokémon Go in the first week of availability. Users must create a unique nickname which is linked to either a Google or Pokémon Trainer Club account.

Pokémon Go accesses the phone's location services to tell where the player is in the real world, creating the playing field based on Google Maps data (Fig. 1). It also accesses the camera so it can superimpose game elements on to a real-world backdrop (Fig 2). A player must physically travel to find Pokémon, and once found the player can attempt to capture them. Different Pokémon appear in different environments and at different times of day. This encourages players to explore their local environments, often at unusual hours. Some locations (e.g. police stations, churches, museums, and parks) are coded into the software as PokéStops and Pokémon Gyms. These points of interest are drawn from underlying map data and are not user-editable.
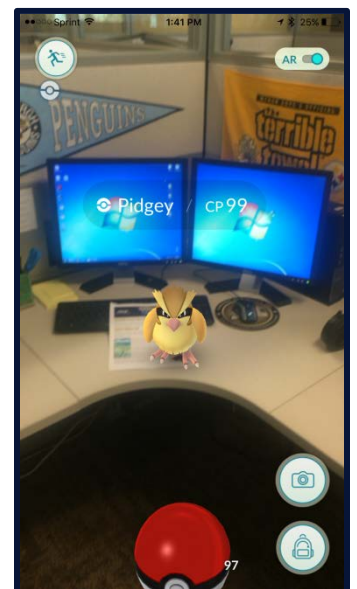

Figure 2

What you CAN do with the information in the app:
- Tell where PokéStops and Pokémon Gyms are (their locations do not change)
- Buy in-game items with real money
- Use in-game items (a lure) to draw more Pokémon to a PokéStop (thereby attracting other players due to increased Pokémon activity)

What you CAN'T do:
- See where other players are
- Contact other players through the app (though a third-party chat app is available)
- Target specific players

Importance to Law Enforcement

The nature of the game encourages people to go places where they might not usually go (and where they may be unfamiliar with local hazards), while keeping their attention focused on their mobile device. There are reports of players injuring themselves through inattention, including a report of a girl who was hit by a car while catching Pokémon.

Likewise, the PokéStops and Pokémon Gyms being automatically generated from underlying data has created problems where that data doesn't capture the full story – such as cases where the solemn nature of the landmark (e.g. The 9/11 Memorial, The Holocaust Museum), or the landmark's current status as private property (e.g. repurposed churches), makes the influx of players a nuisance. Niantic Inc. has made a form available to get a location dropped as a PokéStop or Pokémon Gym.

There was an incident reported in Missouri of armed robbers who took advantage of the fixed nature of PokéStops to "stake out the watering hole", since they knew that these sites would be attractive to players. In-game items, such as the *Lure Module*, can be used to draw additional Pokémon to a PokéStop, making it more appealing to other players. This would allow criminals to lure players in to a specific location where armed robbery, kidnapping, or even sexual assault could occur.
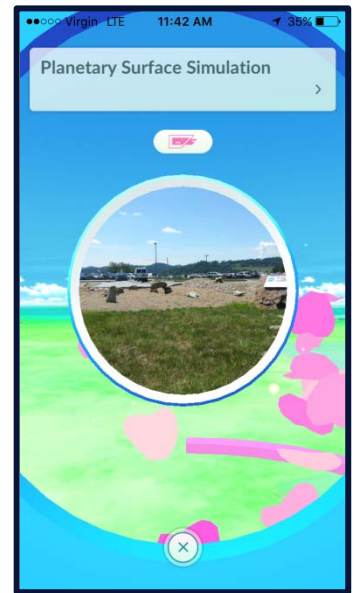

Figure 3

Awareness	Actions
Be aware of an increased level of distraction in the community	Develop and deliver public service announcements regarding responsible gameplay
Be aware of Pokémon Go being a possible explanation for suspicious activity	Incorporate awareness-level briefings in to roll-call
Be aware of PokéStops and Pokémon Gym locations in your area	Request that Niantic, Inc. drop PokéStops and Pokémon Gyms that prove to be dangerous

Glossary

Note: In-game items including but not limited to Pokémon, Poké Balls, Pokécoins, PokéStops, and Pokémon Gyms are virtual items that are only viewable from inside of Pokémon Go's augmented reality interface.

App
Short for "application", is a relatively small, specialized, often single-purpose program meant for use on mobile devices (especially tablets and smartphones)

Augmented Reality (AR)
Is a live view of a physical, real-world environment whose elements are enhanced by computer-generated sensory input such as sound, video, pictures or GPS data. For example the cartoon-style style characters as seen in Figure 2.

Bag Upgrade
This is an item for sale through the Pokémon Go app that increases the number of items that a player can carry at one time.

Egg
This item can be found at PokéStops. Once found they are placed in an egg incubator and after set distance of travel are hatched and reveal a random Pokémon.

Egg Incubator
This is an item for sale through the Pokémon Go app that allows a player to incubate a Pokémon egg.

Experience Points (XP)
Are how your progress is measured throughout playing the game. Players earn XP by catching Pokémon, visiting PokéStops, and other in-game actions.

Gym
See Pokémon Gym.

Hit Points (HP)
How a Pokémon's health is measured.

Incense
This is an item for sale through the Pokémon Go app that allows the player to attract more Pokémon for 30 minutes.

In-game Currency
Virtual currency used in a game to purchase items, upgrades, etc. Can be earned in the game or purchased with real-world currency. Pokécoins are the in-game currency used by Pokémon Go.

In-game Items
Objects earned or purchased in the game. In Pokémon Go these items include bag upgrades, egg incubators, incense, lucky eggs, lure modules, Poké balls, and Pokémon storage upgrades.

Lucky Eggs
This is an item for sale through the Pokémon Go app that increases the amount of experience points a player gets for a short time. Lucky Eggs can also be found at PokéStops.

Lure Module

This is an item for sale through the Pokémon Go app that increases the amount of experience points a player gets for a short time (currently 30 minutes). Lucky Eggs can also be found at PokéStops.

Poké Ball

This is an item that allows the player to play the Pokémon capturing mini-game. The player starts with a certain amount of them and they are a reward for visiting a PokéStop or available for purchase through the Pokemon Go app.

Pokédex

This is where players will find information about all the Pokémon they have caught or encountered in their adventures.

Pokécoins

Pokécoins are the in-game currency used by the Pokémon Go app. Pokécoins can be purchased using real-life money in the shop. Pokécoins can also be earned with in-game actions.

Pokémon

A video game, card game, or other toys featuring certain Japanese cartoon characters. These are the cartoon-style characters players are attempting to capture.

Pokémon Gyms

These are specific locations where you can go and battle the Pokémon of rival teams, or train your own Pokémon.

Pokémon Storage Upgrade

This is an item for sale through the Pokémon Go app that allows the player to carry more Pokémon at one time.

PokéStop

A specific location that you can go to gather items like Poké Balls, Eggs, and Potions.

Potion

Are used to heal your Pokémon. When you use a potion, you restore your Pokémon's Hit Points so they can battle again. Potions are sometimes given as random rewards for visiting a PokéStop and are not available for purchase through the Pokémon Go app.

Revive

Restores a fainted Pokémon and gives it half of its total HP. Revives are sometimes given as random rewards for visiting a PokéStop and are not available for purchase through the Pokémon Go app.