

Franklin County Sheriff's Department starts checks on rural seniors



[ANN BRYANT](#), Staff Writer

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FARMINGTON — The Franklin County Sheriff's Department launched a new program, Elder Check, on Friday. Franklin County Sheriff Scott Nichols described the program, designed to protect senior citizens who live alone and unassisted, during a local radio station broadcast Friday morning.

Regular weekly checks made by deputies on people who live on their own in rural areas, sometimes with no family nearby, is expected to ensure their safety and also introduce seniors to law enforcement, Nichols said later Friday.

"The idea is to ensure that our seniors are not being taken advantage of by scam artists, that their medications are not being stolen and are located in a safe place, that their home is properly secured for their own safety and that they are not being used or abused by family members or friends," he said in a release.

Scams and being taken advantage of by family or friends does happen, he said. It's not rampant, but officers are responding to more of these complaints.

Being of a different generation, sometimes the seniors are less likely to call, he said.

If family or friends think law enforcement is involved on a regular basis, it could help deter these activities, he said.

"It is something that has been weighing on my mind," he said. "If my own grandparents were living alone in rural Franklin County, I'd want them checked on."

The department does a rotating weekly check of rural camp properties, so why wouldn't it work to check on our seniors, he said.

Nichols sees it as a public service requiring no funding. It's a good chance to take care of seniors in our rural areas, he said.

The officers will stop for a short visit to determine that they are OK. It is completely voluntary.

Initially, Nichols is reaching out to northern, southern and western portions of the county where towns do not have police departments.

There's only so much manpower, but if the numbers are not too high they will try to add Farmington, Wilton and Jay, he said.

After the Friday radio program, seniors soon started calling the department.

Those who would like a visit or know someone who could benefit from a weekly visit can contact the department at 778-2680 or 800-773-2680.

Nichols planned to stop by a woman's house on the way home Friday.

There is a short form to fill out to provide the department with some basic information.

Different officers will make the visits, helping seniors get to know and be more comfortable with them, he said.

abryant@sunjournal.com