

The Internet Service Providers' Association of Ireland
"Second Report Of The www.hotline.ie Service"
For the two-year period from 1 July 2001 to 30 June 2003

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Hotline is now well established as the key operational component of the self-regulatory regime operated by the ISP industry in Ireland. The Hotline was established to provide the public with a mechanism to report material that they encounter on the Internet and which they suspect may be illegal. It has been in operation since November 1999. It is through the Hotline and its membership of the INHOPE association of international hotlines, that the ISP industry in Ireland makes its contribution to combat illegal content on the Internet both at home and abroad.

In its initial years, the Hotline gained from the operational experience of its longer established and larger INHOPE counterparts but has now moved into a phase of providing experience into the network. This may prove particularly relevant to the smaller EU accession countries setting up Hotlines on a scale which Ireland largely pioneered.

In this reporting period from the 1st July 2001 until 30th June 2003 the Hotline received 1792 reports. This is a 123% increase on the total received in the previous two years. In the current reporting period, no valid report was received by the Hotline where the content was confirmed as probably illegal and the source of the material proved to be in Ireland.

Analysis of reports has shown that a high percentage prove not to refer to illegal material. 16% proved to be child pornography hosted or distributed from other jurisdictions and 39% were assessed as not illegal. However, of concern, are the 42% of reports where the material reported could not be found by the Hotline. This is primarily caused by inaccurate or overly broad information being submitted in the report.

70% of reports received by the Hotline were suspected as being child pornography by the reporter. A considerable proportion (approx. 26%) of these were determined as actually being adult pornography. Many of these reports resulted from UCEs (spam) that contained terminology, which many people would infer as advertising child related material. However, on investigation the Hotline found the UCEs were promoting adult pornographic sites. There is an issue, outside of the Hotline remit, about advertising standards being employed by sections of the adult pornography industry.

The Hotline task is a labour intensive and time-consuming process of methodically locating reported content, identifying the target of the complaint, verifying whether or not it may be illegal, recording the results and, when appropriate, preparing onward reports to INHOPE or law enforcement. It can be aided to a small degree by semi-automation of the report input mechanism but requires co-operation of the reporting public to use the web-based facilities provided. The Hotline must continue its exploration of the options to reduce the number of ineffective reports made.

Over the reporting period Internet technologies have evolved which place new demands on the skills of Hotline employees. For example "peer to peer" file-sharing and mobile access add new levels of complexity and time required to find reported material and ascertain in which country it is hosted.

The techniques being used by criminals to avoid detection are constantly evolving. Knowledge of how sources are disguised is becoming a field of study in itself. Virus-born relays and web-site cloaking systems being the latest in a long line of measures aimed at making the task of law enforcement and Hotlines more difficult. The Hotline invests in staff training to meet these demands and is supported through the INHOPE network of hotlines by sharing of expertise.

The Hotline is very cognisant of the plight of the children who are being abused in the production of the illegal images reported to us. It is the goal of ISPAI in running the Hotline that the industry

reacts quickly and plays its part in curtailing this misuse of the Internet to distribute these images. It must be emphasised that it is only An Garda Síochána who fulfil the role of law enforcement and conducting criminal investigations of the perpetrators of such content on the Internet. In any case of reported illegal content, once the Hotline has passed its assessment of the content and the technical Internet information it has gathered to the Gardaí, the Hotline's role is completed. The Hotline very much appreciates the support it has received for its operations over the reporting period from An Garda Síochána.

The report is testament to the effectiveness of self-regulation of the Internet in Ireland over the two-year reporting period. The ISPAI and Hotline are committed to ensuring as best as is practicable and within the constraints of the law that Irish Internet facilities should not be misused for the dissemination of illegal material. Unfortunately criminal intent in any field can never be eliminated and the INHOPE Hotlines are witnessing new measures of deception being employed. The Hotline must therefore continue to develop its skills if it is to contribute effectively to global measures being taken against illegal content on the Internet.