Mission

To work in partnership with internet service providers, telecommunications companies, mobile operators, software providers, the police, Government and the public to minimise the availability of online illegal content, particularly child abuse images.

Vision

Combating child abuse images online

Remit

To minimise the availability of potentially illegal internet content specifically:
- Images of child abuse hosted anywhere in the world
- Criminally obscene content hosted in the UK
- Incitement to racial hatred content hosted in the UK

Role

- To foster trust and confidence in the internet among current and future fixed and mobile internet users
- To assist service providers to combat the abuse of their systems for the dissemination of criminal content
- To assist law enforcement in the fight against criminal content on the internet

www.iwf.org.uk
From the Chief Executive

2005 was one of our busiest years yet with more reports than ever being processed and record numbers of websites assessed as potentially illegal. We were able to announce an impressive situation as regards UK hosted content, with just 0.4 per cent of potentially illegal content hosted in this country. I am pleased to say that the UK remains one of the most hostile online spaces in the world to publish and distribute images of child abuse and that the first half of 2006 showed that only 0.2 per cent of such content is now hosted in the UK.

We are also pleased to be able to reveal the results of a pilot study we carried out regarding the number of potentially illegal child abuse websites that are slow to be taken down around the world. Despite the UK’s good record, a proportion of the 99.8 per cent of potentially illegal sites hosted overseas are still accessible to internet users in the UK.

This snapshot supports our contention that policies, laws and priorities in different countries lead to websites not being removed for days, weeks, months or even years after we have reported them to the relevant law enforcement agencies and, where they exist, to the Hotline in that country. We trust this data highlights where systems are being abused the most and can contribute to the spread of best practice in this area around the world.

Indeed, we are entering an exciting, dynamic and demanding period involving advances in new technologies as well as new trends in the distribution of child abuse images. This report gives more of an insight into our work, our expertise and our future as well as into the issue of potentially illegal content online and how to combat its proliferation and the abuse of children around the world.

Peter Robbins QPM
Chief Executive

Amanda Jordan OBE, IWF Chair with Peter Robbins QPM, IWF Chief Executive
“ISPA UK’s work with the IWF has shown consistent and ongoing success as evidenced by the IWF’s 2006 figures. The UK Internet industry is leading the world in the development of a safer Internet. Technological research and development from within the UK Internet industry has made great strides towards curtailing the availability of child abuse images on the Internet.”

Nick Lansman
Secretary General
ISPA
Our figures reveal another decrease in the number of websites containing potentially illegal child abuse images hosted in the UK. Only 0.2 per cent of potentially illegal online content is now hosted in the UK, compared with 0.4 per cent in 2005. When we our work, ten years ago, the UK hosted 18 per cent of this content.

Compared with the first six months of 2005, our 2006 half yearly figures reveal a 24 per cent increase in reports processed and an increase of 49 per cent in the number of those reports where potentially illegal content was found. A third of all reports are now confirmed to contain potentially illegal content.

This is not necessarily representative of a rise in the number of potentially illegal websites. It could signify greater public intolerance of this content coupled with a growing public awareness of where to report suspect websites.

Crucially, our Hotline Team have developed technologies and expertise to exploit information provided by the public’s reports to the maximum. This provides a wealth of intelligence which helps us to trace websites and enhances the quality of information passed to our international partners around the world in a united approach to having potentially illegal child abuse websites removed.

88 per cent of the total reports processed refer to websites suspected of containing child abuse images, nine per cent refer to criminally obscene content and about two per cent refer to incitement to racial hatred content (although a small number, reports in this category have seen a 79 per cent increase compared to the same period last year, particularly since the London bombings in July 2005). It is important to note that all our ‘actioned’ reports relate to potentially illegal child abuse content. In order to protect the UK’s internet users from inadvertent exposure to this content, these websites are listed in our database which we pass to internet, mobile and software companies to implement blocking mechanisms to protect their customers.

There have been changes in the figures revealing which countries host potentially illegal child abuse content. Key statistics include the US apparently hosting 57.8 per cent of commercial child abuse content and 49.5 per cent of non-commercial child abuse content (51.1 per cent of child abuse content overall as compared to 40 per cent for the whole of 2005).

There are a number of international efforts and initiatives designed to facilitate and encourage the establishment of a hotline in Russia which has seen a decrease in the total amount of child abuse content it appears to hosts – 14.9 per cent as compared to 27.9 for 2005. Countries such as Japan, South Korea, Thailand and Spain continue to feature.
The UK can be proud of the fact that only 0.2 per cent of child abuse content is hosted on UK servers. On those rare occasions it is hosted here, those reports are processed within 24 hours and the potentially illegal content is usually taken down within 48 hours.

For the first time, we can reveal the results from a pilot study examining the longevity of potentially illegal websites hosted around the world. We compared a list of ‘live’ websites containing child abuse content at the beginning and end of a six week period and analysed the origins and nature of the websites which were still accessible. Despite us identifying potentially illegal websites and reporting them to hotlines and law enforcement authorities in the countries hosting the content, 287 websites remained live and still contained images of child abuse for the duration of the study. That accounts for about 20 per cent of all those on the IWF database of live websites containing potentially illegal child abuse images at any one time.

Over 80 per cent of the websites still accessible were non-commercial sites where paedophiles share images of children being abused. Just over 11 per cent were commercial websites selling images of child abuse for financial gain. We have noticed that a number of these commercial sites constantly change servers, from one country to another, in order to avoid the authorities.

The majority of the websites still accessible (54 per cent) contained Level 1 images. These are classified as pictures depicting the erotic posing of children under the age of
18, with no sexual activity. A significant number of the other sites contained Level 4 images which are pictures of penetrative sexual activity between children and adults.

Whilst this is just a snapshot of the current situation, we can reveal that some of these websites were first reported by our analysts to the relevant authorities up to five years ago. Nearly four per cent of the websites were reported in 2005 and a further four per cent were first identified by us between 2001 and 2004, yet remain active on servers hosted around the world.

We intend to provide a more in depth analysis of this information in our Annual Report 2006.

Hotline News

Other news from the Hotline reveals the continuation of a trend for hosting non-commercial images of child abuse on Japanese message boards and also a growing trend for US free hosting systems to be abused. We have noticed that photo album services have been targeted. These services allow users to upload pictures for sharing purposes without charge. The first half of 2006 showed a trend for these being used to post photographs of child abuse. The Hotline also reports an emerging trend for the sharing and commercialisation of videos of child abuse online.

49 intelligence reports were submitted to the UK police regarding matters of concern outside our remit such as grooming allegations and we have provided six evidential statements to the police to support the intended prosecution of offenders.

One prosecution in February saw a 50 year old man sentenced to three and a half years imprisonment after pleading guilty to 22 charges relating to the possession, making and distribution of indecent images of children. The charges related to websites which people subscribed to from all over the world. The offender was investigated as a result of information passed to Cheshire Police by our ‘Hotline’ analysts.

“CEOP welcomes the IWF’s new Hotline figures which can provide UK and international law enforcement agencies with more intelligence than ever before to inform the global fight against the proliferation of child abuse images on the internet”

Jim Gamble
Chief Executive
Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre
New Ministers

We are delighted to welcome new Ministers to key roles in Government departments relevant to our work. We wish them every success and look forward to forging close links in the future.

Vernon Coaker MP, Under-Secretary for Policing, Security and Community Safety
Home Office

“The Internet Watch Foundation leads the way in combating online child abuse content hosted anywhere in the world as well as criminally obscene and incitant to racial hatred content hosted in the UK. That only 0.2 per cent of potentially illegal content is now hosted in the UK is clear evidence of its success and the Government congratulates the IWF and its partners on its achievements over the last decade. This success is testament to the united efforts of the British public, police, Government, the online industry and many others to tackle the availability of this kind of material.

The IWF’s new figures reveal for the first time the longevity of potentially illegal sites being hosted overseas. Whilst the IWF works to have illegal content hosted in the UK taken down within 48 hours, not all countries have such an effective record with reported sites remaining live for days, weeks and even months, therefore remaining accessible to offenders in the UK and elsewhere. UK Ministers continue to press for greater action at an international level, but this report underlines the importance of the work the IWF and ISPs are doing to block all UK residents from accessing websites, wherever they are hosted, identified as potentially illegal by the IWF by the end of 2007.

Whilst we can be proud of the UK’s record as a hostile space for those seeking to host, publish and share images of child abuse, it is crucial to raise awareness among UK internet users about the IWF as the vehicle to report their inadvertent exposure to this type of content. I look forward to working closely with the IWF as they continue to tackle the demands of keeping pace with the rapidly evolving nature of the internet and those who set out to use it for criminal purposes.”

Rt. Hon. Margaret Hodge MP, Minister of State for Industry and the Regions
Department of Trade and Industry

“The success of the Internet Watch Foundation is an example of partnership, self-regulation and industry’s social responsibility at its best. With potentially illegal content almost eradicated from UK internet hosts, the challenge for the IWF now is to thwart child abuse content hosted overseas that can still be accessed from the UK.

It was interesting to hear that the IWF has processed more reports than ever regarding potentially illegal websites. This demonstrates both the public’s intolerance of this material and that an increasing number of people know to report potentially illegal online content to the IWF. The large rise in numbers of sites confirmed by the IWF as potentially illegal reflects the organisation’s effectiveness and increased technological sophistication.

The IWF has a crucial role in providing a list of potentially illegal child abuse websites to ISPs, mobile operators, search providers and filtering companies so they can play their part in protecting UK internet users from inadvertent exposure to these terrible images. By working closely with the IWF, business is showing its commitment now and in the future to a united effort to defeat this crime. I believe this is a credit to all concerned and is an object lesson on how to achieve public policy goals in the information age. I look forward to working with and supporting the IWF and business in addressing the threat of child abuse images on the internet.”

We are delighted to welcome new Ministers to key roles in Government departments relevant to our work. We wish them every success and look forward to forging close links in the future.
The issue of potentially illegal content online is characterised by ongoing challenges, despite our success in the UK, due to the global nature of the crime and the constantly evolving technologies and innovative services created by online companies.

Recent developments in social networking, MMS and online picture and video storage services facilitate a wide range of positive communications, however, there is a potential for these networking spaces to be abused. We have received reports about such sites and occasionally these reports do constitute potentially illegal content. Most of these sites are hosted overseas so we pass details of those reports which breach UK law to the Hotline in that country, where such a service exists, and in every case, to Interpol via our Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre partners. If the sites are hosted within the UK we work with the police and the content service providers to have the content removed and, if possible, the publisher prosecuted.

The anonymity provided by some forms of online payment systems is an issue we continue to witness. In our Annual Report 2005 we highlighted the increasing use of electronic ‘gold’ trading online. Although this continues to be one of the systems of payment still being used by online paedophiles, we have also noticed a return to the use of credit card payments online.

Our figures reveal those nations whose internet service providers (ISPs) appear to have been abused in the past six months. With a large proportion of the world’s internet users, servers and ISPs in the US, their Cybertipline, NCMEC, and US law enforcement agencies have a considerable task in tackling the apparently high level of abuse of their hosting networks. We will continue to work in partnership with the Cybertipline to alert them to the potentially illegal content we believe is hosted in the US.

Meanwhile, the trends in potentially illegal websites around the world continue to change. For example, Japanese networks appeared to be hosting increased amounts of non-commercial child abuse images, however, this trend has tailed off recently. Our staff have met with Japanese delegations on a number of occasions to share knowledge and expertise in this area and we hope that a Japanese ‘Hotline’ will soon be admitted to the INHOPE Association of ‘Hotlines’ of which the IWF is a member.

Our Chief Executive, Peter Robbins, has continued his commitment to share the IWF’s experience and knowledge outside the UK and he has addressed international delegations in Luxembourg and Paris as well as receiving visitors from South Korea, USA, Japan and China.

We particularly look forward to helping to develop a European database of potentially illegal child abuse websites which will facilitate Europe-wide improvements in effectiveness and information sharing amongst hotlines.
Thank you to more organisations than ever before
Contacts and Information

Email members@iwf.org.uk if you would like information about becoming a member of the IWF.

Email media@iwf.org.uk if you would like to receive the e-newsletter, write a story about the IWF’s work, have a presentation from an IWF member of staff, collaborate with the IWF in the future or be sent IWF literature and materials.

To make a charitable donation or to find out more about who we are and what we do visit www.iwf.org.uk.

Please note that the terms ‘child pornography’ or ‘child porn’ can act to legitimise images which are not pornography. Rather, they are permanent records of children being sexually abused and as such should be referred to as child abuse images.

“Easynet highly values its partnership with the IWF. It is pleased to be part of a group of responsible companies, helping to support the invaluable work of the IWF.”

Dave Simpson
Head of Regulatory Affairs
Easynet

www.iwf.org.uk