[IE] Child Pornography Hotline Issues First Report

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In November 1999 the Internet Service Providers of Ireland set up a hotline service, www.hotline.ie, to combat child pornography on the Internet. This is one of a number of self-regulatory measures that have been taken by the Internet service provider industry. The hotline service works closely with various domestic bodies including An Garda Síochána (the Irish police force), and with the INHOPE Association, an international association of hotlines in twelve countries (http://www.inhope.org/).

The www.hotline.ie has just published its First Report, covering the period November 1999 - June 2001. It states that in that period, more than 600 reports of alleged child pornography (as well as a much smaller number of reports of other types of objectionable material) were received. Not all of the reports received resulted in actionable cases of child pornography, and in many other instances the offending material was outside the jurisdiction.

Once a report is received, the hotline service attempts to trace the material. If successful, the service will then assess it to see if it is potentially illegal under The Child Trafficking and Pornography Act, 1998. The Act makes it an offence for anyone to knowingly produce, distribute, print, publish, import, export, sell, show or possess any child pornography. If the material is located on a server based in Ireland, the hotline service issues a notice to the Internet Service Provider to remove the potentially illegal material, and An Garda Síochána may decide to begin a criminal investigation. If the material is located on a server based in another State that is a member of the INHOPE Association, the hotline service then hands the investigation over to the service in that State.

The First Report deals with a number of issues that have given rise to difficulties in the course of its work. These include: investigating complicated websites, some of which may be protected by passwords or viruses; tracking and managing reports, as there is no standard software package available that will do this in a secure, reliable and flexible manner; archiving reports and material - at present the INHOPE Association best practices state that the hotline service should not archive material, since in most jurisdictions it is illegal for hotlines to store or possess any child pornography; recruiting suitable staff - INHOPE best practices state that offers of help from members of the public should not be accepted; developing protocol with An Garda Síochána, the Data Protection Commissioner

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and Internet Service Providers; the rate of change in the Internet industry; handling reports relating to material from countries outside the European Union where no hotlines exist; and marketing and public relations issues. Although many of these issues have now been resolved with the assistance of more-experienced members of INHOPE, this took longer than anticipated.

The Report also contains some sample reports received from members of the public. It concludes with advice and guidelines to parents based on the EU Safer Internet Action Plan.

First Report of www.hotline.ie

https://www.hotline.ie/news/hotline_first_report.pdf

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