[GB] Government Publishes Good Practice Models and Guidance for Child Protection on Internet

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The UK Home Office (the equivalent of a Ministry of the Interior) includes a task force on child protection on the Internet; this is a co-regulatory body including, in addition to as government officials, representatives of opposition parties, child welfare organisations, the Internet industry, the police and others. It was established in 2001 after fears of abuse of the Internet by paedophiles. The task force has published a set of good practice models and guidance for the Internet industry applying to chat services, instant messaging and web-based services. The models and guidance are voluntary and so depend on industry co-operation; their adoption will also depend on the nature of the service and whether it is a small, closed group, or an open community environment.

The model on chat services recommends the provision of (i) clear information on the kind of service offered, for example whether it is moderated, and (ii) clear, prominent and accessible safety advice with links to on-line safety guides. Only limited personal information should be gathered and posted, and safety tools such as ignore buttons and language filters should be provided. A reporting system for incidents should be provided and, in moderated chat aimed at children, a panic/help button.

In the case of instant messaging services, clear information should be made available about the nature of the product, for example whether it is an open community environment or a personal one-to-one environment for communicating with friends. Information should be provided on how to keep safe on-line and there should be clear facilities for reporting abuse. Clear guidance on privacy policy should also be made available.

For Web-based services, particular attention should be paid to hyper-linking to third-party sites from sites aimed at children, and the content of the third-party sites should be checked for suitability. Data protection legislation should be complied with and a privacy statement provided by web-sites that collect personal data with special protection for children's privacy. Special rules apply to children's advertising and safety advice should be provided on sites aimed at children. Third-party content via bulletin boards may also be moderated. Providers of adult content have special responsibilities for child protection, for example through opt-in lists. Further guidance is given for connectivity providers (who provide access

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to the Internet) and for hosting providers (who provide web space).

In addition to these co-regulatory measures, the Government is to legislate to strengthen the criminal law applying to sexual offences.

"Good practice models and guidance for the internet industry on: Chat Services, Instant Messaging (IM) and Web Based Services", Home Office Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet, Home Office, January 2003

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