VIRTUAL GLOBAL TASKFORCE NEWSLETTER

Summer 2006 *Issue* **2**

The Virtual Global Taskforce (VGT) is an international partnership of law enforcement agencies created to fight online child abuse. The Taskforce comprises the Australian High Tech Crime Centre, the UK's Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Interpol.

VGT website scores first prosecution

Thursday 22 June saw the first prosecution for the VGT - as a direct result of an online report to the VGT website.

Lee Costi, 21, from Haslemere, Surrey, UK was sentenced to nine years at Nottingham Crown Court after admitting to three counts of meeting a child following sexual grooming, three counts of sexual activity with a child, two counts of making indecent images of children and possession of 43 indecent images of children.

The report was sent by one of Costi's victims days after the launch of the VGT website in early 2005. From the report, law enforcement officers in the UK were able to seek out Costi and make an arrest. Following forensic analysis of his hard drive, over 40 other chat logs to children were identified including two additional children who had been sexually abused by Costi.

Sentencing Costi, Judge Jonathon Teare described him as a 'predatory paedophile' with a 'totally unhealthy and depraved interest in young girls'.

Jim Gamble, who heads the Virtual Global Taskforce (VGT), sees the sentencing of Lee Costi as a significant milestone. He said: "This result of this case goes a long way to show that online reporting of child sex abusers by young people is effective in helping law enforcement to identify offenders and bring them to justice and ensuring that other children are spared this potentially horrific ordeal.

"This result sends out a very clear message to people who prey on children to sexually abuse them - seek help or be assured you will get caught. Child sex abuse is one of the worst crimes imaginable and while the internet is a very vibrant environment for children and young people, it is also a place where people have to be careful".

VGT gets a makeover

The Virtual Global Taskforce website has had a facelift! The new site was launched on 24 April 2006 and continues to provide a wide range of advice and information about how to stay safe online.

The website, still at www.virtualglobaltaskforce.com, has been re-designed to make it more accessible and easier to navigate.

The website's reporting function has also been improved and made more user-friendly. So far, around 400 adults and children in Australia and the UK have reported abuse to the police via the Virtual Global Taskforce website. These have resulted in a number of arrests. Over the coming months, adults and children in Canada and the US will also be able to make reports to the relevant agencies through the website.

In the first month the new look website received 125,000 visits (3 million hits). We hope that the newly updated site will allow us to continue with our efforts to make the internet a safer place.

VIRTUAL GLOBAL TASKFORCE NEWSLETTER
Summer 2006 *Issue* **2**

Online reporting really works

This spring the VGT sprung into action when VGT partners in the United Kingdom and the United States worked together to snag an online predator.

The operation began following an online report from a concerned UK resident to their local police force, who in turn brought this to the attention of the VGT in the UK.

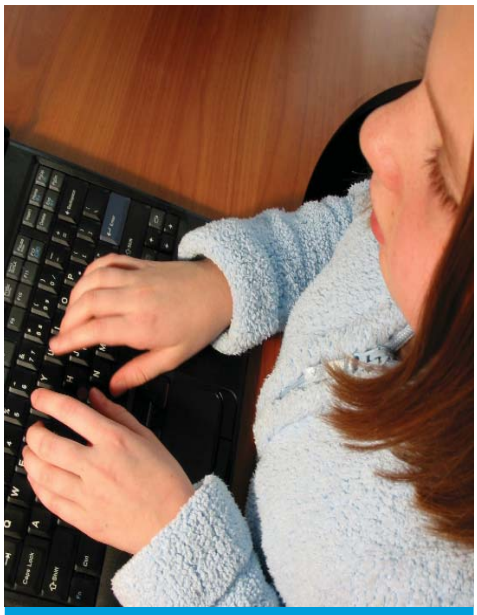
The report detailed that whilst on the internet, she was contacted by a man unknown to her. After some time chatting, this new 'friend' told her that he had previously had sex with his ten-year-old stepdaughter and offered to molest the stepdaughter again in front of his web cam for her 'entertainment' later that evening. The man also sent ten digital images of child abuse to the woman through email, instant messenger and via his mobile phone.

The National Crime Squad - the then UK partner of the VGT - contacted the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency who helped track down the identity of the man through his US based, MSN email and instant messenger accounts.

Special agents from ICE were able to expedite the request for subscriber information and within hours the UK had the necessary information to identify and locate their man.

A search warrant was then executed at the suspects address where officers were able to determine that, whilst the suspect did not in fact have a step-daughter, there was a girl living in the neighbourhood, who matched the description of the girl in the report.

Through the VGT network, law enforcement officers were able to gain near real-time, critical intelligence that was essential to rescue a child suspected of being in immediate danger.



A very social network

Social networking sites appear to be the latest craze across the world and are proving increasingly popular with children and young people.

Social networking sites are websites with applications which help connect friends using blogs, profiles, internal email systems and photos. Users are able to disclose personal details such as marital status, physical appearance and which school they attend, making sites obvious targets for those who have a sexual interest in children.

The VGT are working with providers in an attempt to keep the risks to a minimum and to try to ensure safer internet environments. Information for children and young people on how to stay safe within these sites has been posted on the VGT website at www.virtuaglobaltaskforce.com.

VIRTUAL GLOBAL TASKFORCE NEWSLETTER
Summer 2006 *Issue* **2**

A safety-Net for all Australians

NetAlert is Australia's internet safety advisory body providing practical advice on internet safety, parental control and internet filters for the protection of children, students and families. Funded by the Australian government, their vision is for a safer internet experience, particularly for young people and their families.

The Australian government provides funding to NetAlert through the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts headed by Senator the Honourable Helen Coonan, Minister for that portfolio. Federal Agent Kevin Zuccato, Director Australian High Tech Crime Centre is a member of the NetAlert Board.

NetAlert's current resources include:

- **Website** (www.netalert.net.au) and free call Internet safety helpline 1800-880-176 (enquiries@netalert.net.au).
- **Netty's World** (www.nettysworld.com.au) - games and advice for younger children aged 4-8 years old.
- **CyberQuoll** (www.cyberquoll.com.au) - interactive with advice and resources for students, teachers and parents. Aimed at children 8-12 years old.
- **Wise up to IT** (www.wiseuptoit.com.au) - DVD with 4 case studies on cyber-bullying, online grooming, cyberstalking and identity theft with helpful contacts for teenage support.
- **Parent's Internet Safety Toolkit** (www.netalert.net.au/parents) - interactive case studies on queries from real parents including solutions, top tips, contacts and resource material.
- **Teacher's Resources (CyberSafe Schools)** (www.netalert.net.au/schools) - includes a Teacher's Guide to Internet Safety, primary and secondary curriculum wall charts and a quick reference guide.
- **Librarian's Resources** (www.netalert.net.au/library) - includes a Librarian's Guide to Internet Safety, safety tip stand and computer prompt.
- **Research** into internet safety issues - available from www.netalert.net.au/03088-Research.asp
- **Information and family help sheets** - available for download from the NetAlert website (www.netalert.net.au/02530-Downloads.asp)

NetAlert's current activities include:

- **NetAlert Expo** (www.netalert.net.au/expo) - visiting every State and Territory in Australia this Expo holds events in local communities to promote internet safety awareness and education in local communities. Presentations outlining online issues are held in various venues such as community centres, libraries and schools.

NetAlert works closely with law enforcement in Australia and is an active supporter of the Virtual Global Taskforce.

Jim Gamble, CEO, CEOP Centre

Launch of the UK's CEOP Centre

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) was launched in the UK on 24 April 2006. The CEOP Centre is based in London and is headed up by Jim Gamble, former Deputy Director of the National Crime Squad. CEOP is the UK's partner to the VGT.

The CEOP Centre is made up of a dedicated team from law enforcement, children's charities and industry working together to tackle on and offline child sex abuse wherever and whenever it happens. Microsoft, AOL, the NSPCC and Visa are just some of the organisations involved.

CEOP is looking to deliver a 24/7 online reporting resource, systems to track sex offenders and to disseminate intelligence globally, identify victims and tackle both the abuser and seize assets from those who profit in the trade of child abuse images.

They have also set up their own website which has been designed and written specifically for young people. It contains up to date information on having fun and being safer online, as well as how to report any problems. This website is called www.thinkuknow.co.uk and is part of CEOP's education programme which will be launched to schools later in the year.

VIRTUAL GLOBAL TASKFORCE NEWSLETTER

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A positive i.d. - working with Interpol

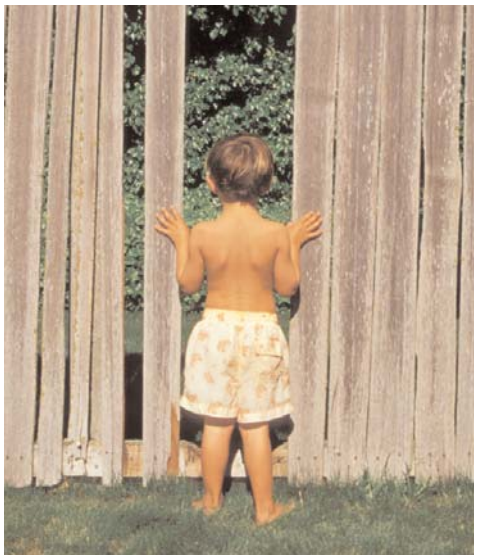
The Interpol database of child abuse images continues to expand and at the end of May 2006 we are now able to identify 439 children whose images appear in over 40,000 different photographs that have been rescued from abuse.

At the Interpol General Secretariat, Ireland have agreed to second an officer to work with images of abuse and the image analysis resource centre continues to expand its register of global experts to assist in victim identification. The latest initiative is to identify lip readers of various nationalities to assist in video analysis where the sound track has been removed. In addition, Interpol are working to secure short term attachments of officers from countries not currently working with images to try and identify victims from their regions. Ukraine, Poland, Belarus and Sri Lanka have so far participated and victims have been identified.

Interpol also held their 24th meeting of the Specialist Group on Crimes Against Children in Canada between 30 May and 1 June. A number of VGT members participated and the theme group on Internet Facilitated Crimes Against Children was chaired by Paul Griffiths from the UK's Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre.

Interpol will continue with its commitment to the Virtual Global Taskforce and its aim in making the internet a safer place.

Bringing investigators together in Canada



Internet-facilitated child sexual exploitation is one of the fastest growing crimes which, in turn, creates profound challenges for law enforcement. In what some believe to be an anonymous medium, internet sexual predators are connecting across continents and committing serious crimes against the most vulnerable members of our society - our children. It is essential that law enforcement, private industry and governments continue to leverage their strength to catch those who engage in viewing, distributing and producing child sexual abuse images.

Canada's National Child Exploitation Coordination Centre (NCECC) works collaboratively with law enforcement across Canada and internationally to specifically combat this type of criminal activity.

The national centre helps facilitate the integration of law enforcement partners by providing Canadian investigators with a unique opportunity to join across jurisdictions at the NCECC's annual workshops. The workshops are specifically designed to provide investigators with the tools they require to more effectively address the issue of online sexual exploitation of children. It is also an opportunity for participants to discuss best practices and investigational techniques.

The third national workshop was held May 16-18, 2006 in Fredericton, New Brunswick with presentations on the Child Exploitation Tracking System (CETS), the national training program and travelling sex offenders. Investigators also attended presentations given by representatives from international partner organizations such as the Virtual Global Taskforce and the Child Exploition and Online Protection Centre (CEOP).

Child protection in Cambodia

As part of their international strategy, CEOP have sent a team to team to Cambodia for a number of weeks to work alongside the Cambodian National Police to prevent UK nationals from traveling to abuse children in the area.

This work is part of a campaign of activity in the region where CEOP are seeking to strengthen relations with the Cambodians - on behalf of the UK - and during this visit will facilitate a seminar with the Interior Ministry, Cambodian Police and local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) on practical information sharing.

If you would like any further information on the VGT please email sandra.king@ceop.gov.uk