

U.S., Russia smash Web site for child pornography videos

By Jerry Seper
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An international investigation by the U.S. Customs Service and Moscow police has resulted in the arrest of nine suspected pornographers — four in the United States and five in Russia — with agents shutting down a Web site that sold videotapes of children engaged in sexual acts.

The investigation, known as "Operation Blue Orchid," uncovered the sale of hundreds of videotapes through a Web site created at an apartment in Moscow, which sold and promoted child pornography that was shipped directly to customers through private courier and the postal service.

Customs Service officials ac-

knowledged that the probe began in May, when police in Moscow asked U.S. authorities for help. The tapes, which ranged in price from \$200 to \$300 each, were shipped mostly to the United States after purchase on a Web site known as the Blue Orchid.

"Operation Blue Orchid demonstrates that there really are no borders when it comes to our mutual interest in protecting children," said acting Customs Commissioner Charles Winwood. "Regrettably, it also demonstrates that there really are no borders when it comes to using the Internet to exploit children."

Customs spokesman Dennis Murphy said more than 20 separate investigations into the suspected production and distribution

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of child pornography are under way as a result of Operation Blue Orchid, and that additional arrests are expected.

Separate investigations also have begun in Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands.

"We have to send a message: Those who are using the Internet this way cannot hide," said Mr. Winwood.

The U.S. investigation was coordinated by the Customs Service Cybersmuggling Center in Fair-

fax.

According to Customs officials, Moscow police made the first arrest in the probe in December when Sergey Garbko and Vsevolod Soltsev-Elbe were taken into custody as the suspected ringleaders of the porn operation. Moscow police told U.S. authorities that Mr. Elbe had transported a 13-year-old boy to Moscow for sexual exploitation. More than 400 videotapes were seized from Mr. Elbe's apartment.

Those arrests, they said, led Customs agents to Portage, Ind., where Glenn Martikean was arrested and indicted last week on six federal counts of trading in pornography.

Authorities said Mr. Martikean was in Moscow attempting to have sex with a child when he was first identified. He later was arrested on his return to the United States.

It was the Cybersmuggling Center's information that led Moscow police to the suspected ringleaders and the Blue Orchid site.

Derek Lochiatto of Malden, Mass., was arrested and appeared yesterday in U.S. District Court in Massachusetts on charges he attempted to receive child pornography from the Russian Web site. He also was charged with possession

of other child pornography obtained over the Internet. He was ordered released on \$10,000 unsecured bond until an April 18 hearing, according to Samantha Martin, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Attorney's office in Boston.

Names of two other persons arrested in the United States were not released.

Customs officials said the tapes featured the sexual abuse of young Russian boys. The ring's customers purchased the videotapes by wiring cash, along with e-mails containing instructions on where the tapes were to be sent. Officials said some of the intercepted e-mail messages show the ring was planning to begin making custom-made tapes for \$5,000 each, showing whatever a customer ordered.