



Children's Charities' Coalition on Internet Safety

PRESS RELEASE

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Children's charities regret Government failure to deal with child abuse images on the internet

The Children's Charities' Coalition on Internet Safety today expressed both regret and serious concern at the UK Government's failure to resolve the issue of access to child abuse images on the internet. Zoe Hilton, policy adviser for the NSPCC speaking on behalf of CHIS, today said

"Over 700,000 households in the UK can still get uninterrupted and easy access to illegal child abuse image sites. Allowing this loophole helps to feed the appalling trade in images which feature real children being seriously sexually assaulted. We now need decisive action from the government to ensure the Internet Service Providers that are still refusing to block this foul material are forced to fall into line. Self-regulation on this issue is obviously failing – and in a seriously damaging way for children."

Notes to editors:

In a letter to Margaret Moran MP, dated 11th May, 2006, Home Office Minister Vernon Coaker MP confirmed that it was Government policy to ensure that all of the UK's Internet Service Providers should deploy a blocking mechanism for child abuse images based on the list of known illegal web sites maintained by the Internet Watch Foundation and that this should be done "by the end of 2007". The Minister went on to say: "If it appears to me we are not going to meet that target through co-operation, we will review the options for imposing this on any elements of the industry that are not facing up to their responsibilities to their customers."

Some people commented at the time that allowing ISPs 18 months to bring themselves into line on something like this was excessively generous but at least it was a definite, time-limited commitment.

In answer to a Parliamentary Question asked by Helen Goodman MP on 19th June, 2006, Vernon Coaker confirmed that by the end of 1996 the Government expected that 90% of all UK subscribers to the internet would be covered and by the end of 2007 "it will be 100%".

In answer to a question asked by Margaret Moran MP on 17th May, 2007 Vernon Coaker replied "The Government have set a target for every ISP to support the (child pornography) blocking mechanism by the end of 2007."

In answer to a further question asked by Margaret Moran on 16th June, 2008, the Home Office indicated that the percentage of UK households now covered had reached 95%, and this was also confirmed in a letter to CHIS, dated 29th July, 2008, the Home Minister (then Vernon Coaker) confirmed that the number was still 95%.

Finally on 3rd February, 2009, in answer to yet another question put by Margaret Moran MP the new Home Office Minister, Alan Campbell MP, replied as follows:

"In 2006 the Government stated that they wished to see 100 per cent. of consumer broadband connections covered by blocking, which include child pornography, by the end of 2007. Currently in the UK 95 per cent. of consumer broadband connections are covered by blocking. The Government are currently looking at ways to progress the final 5 per cent."

In other words, in getting on for 3 years of effort, the percentage has moved from 90% to 95%, and we still have no idea when the Government will finally conclude that the industry will not get us to the 100% which has been the basis of policy since May 2006.

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