

# Winnipeg Free Press

## Software combats child porn

Wednesday, August 27, 2008  
Page: B1  
Section: City  
Byline: James Turner

Winnipeg police say new software will reduce the time officers have to spend looking at child pornography -- speeding up the submission of evidence for trials and cutting down on the emotional stress officers endure when examining the graphic materials.

Officers in the integrated child exploitation (ICE) unit said Tuesday they have purchased a cutting-edge computer program that categorizes digital images and videos of child abuse in its database, leading to faster turnaround times for investigations.

The software program examines a digital photograph's unique "fingerprint," places it in a police database and filters out ones already known to police.

They say the amount of time saved will free police resources and greatly accelerate the process of handing over the photos and movies as evidence for use in court.

Police admitted Tuesday that the length of time child pornography investigations take has put cases at risk of being lost due to rights violations. Sec. 11(b) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms says suspects have the right to a trial without "unreasonable delay."

Staff Sgt. Brant Bishop said in some investigations, it can take as much as a year for police to fully disclose all evidence necessary for trial. Prior to using the software, officers had to manually sift through each image to identify victims in child pornography and exploitation probes.

"Right now, we're looking at massive disclosure delays... to the point there are virtually charter breaches. That's just not acceptable," Bishop said.

Although no cases have been lost yet, Bishop indicated there are a few currently pending that need to move along soon or potentially they'll be stayed.

"I'll tell you, we're sure on the verge of a couple that are close because it's taking so much time to go through all these databases," he said.

Police say using the software can cut by about three-quarters the amount of police time needed to sit and examine each image.

Bishop said it's not uncommon for police to seize hard drives containing hundreds of thousands of images and videos.

The software, called LACE (Law Enforcement Against Child Exploitation), has already been used in 18 investigations where more than 2.3 million images

were seized. After LACE was put to use, the program filtered out more than 1.7 million of them deemed irrelevant to the work at hand.

The time-saving features of the software will also free investigators to do more undercover work and give them more time to forge links between suspects and their role in the world's multibillion-dollar child pornography industry that police say is continually growing.

LACE was developed by a Quebec-based company called BlueBear Law Enforcement Services. The Winnipeg Police Service is the first in Canada to purchase it and has been using it about a year, Bishop said.

Police would not disclose how much the software cost, saying each jurisdiction works out a separate arrangement with the company.

Aside from the savings in time and resources that the software promises, Bishop said it also greatly reduces the emotional stress viewing the material places on the unit's officers.

Police hinted that attracting and retaining officers to work in the child exploitation unit is difficult, given the nature of the work.

"The most scarring incidents I was involved in were always ones involving kids," Bishop said.

The software was not used in the investigation of a 22-year-old man charged in June with possessing, distributing and accessing child pornography. Police announced the arrest yesterday.

The man is also accused of sexual assault and sexual interference with his five-year-old stepbrother and only slightly older stepsister.

james.turner@freepress.mb.ca

© 2008 The Winnipeg Free Press. All rights reserved.

# The Winnipeg Sun

## Disturbing arrest; Software helped cops sort faster through child porn

Wednesday, August 27, 2008

Page: 3

Section: News

Byline: BY CHRIS KITCHING, SUN MEDIA

Illustrations: photo by Chris Kitching, Sun Media

Bishop with Const. Rob Cole, a computer forensic specialist who co-ordinated the trial run of the new police software.

Winnipeg police detectives are using a new computer program to sort more quickly through child porn collections -- including one allegedly belonging to a 22-year-old man accused of sexually assaulting his two stepsisters -- without having to view most of the offensive material.

The police service is the first in Canada to use LACE (Law Enforcement Against Child Exploitation) software on a full-time basis.

Winnipeg police announced the innovation yesterday -- on the same day that they also discussed a disturbing arrest.

"We used to sit down and go through every single image on the computer, one at a time," said Winnipeg police Staff Sgt. Brant Bishop.

During a trial run, LACE was used in 18 cases and spared the Internet child exploitation (ICE) unit from viewing 74% of material, equalling 1.7 million digital images or videos, Bishop said, noting police still had to view 591,000 files.

One of those cases involved the alleged downloading and distribution of child porn by the 22-year-old, who is also accused of sexually assaulting his two stepsisters, police said yesterday.

Police became aware of a male's alleged online activities when they were tipped off by the National Child Exploitation Co-ordination Centre in May.

ICE seized a computer when they searched a Winnipeg home June 12. Police arrested a male a day later.

Police learned the suspect allegedly sexually assaulted his stepsisters, one of whom was five at the time.

One of the alleged assaults occurred outside Manitoba while the male was still a youth, police said.

In cases like this, police have to view disturbing material to try to identify victims, and categorize files for court purposes.

Prolonged exposure to it can have a "devastating" emotional impact on officers, Bishop said. "The most scarring incidents I was ever involved in were the ones involving kids," he said. "Those are the ones that stick with you, especially when you have a child around the same age."

The software is designed to shorten investigations so detectives can spend more time doing proactive work such as undercover online investigations, and less time sorting hundreds of thousands of files seized from pedophiles and perverts.

Without the software, the terrible task can take a year, so long it threatens to derail cases.

Because it takes a while for police to provide disclosure to lawyers, the delay nears a stage where it may breach a suspect's Charter rights and result in charges being stayed.

Although no cases have been lost, processing evidence faster will reduce that risk, Bishop said.

The software, designed by Quebec-based BlueBear Law Enforcement Services, creates digital hash and image mark values -- a digital fingerprint -- for each child porn image.

Collections are compared against an internal database containing millions of digital fingerprints, which cannot be transformed back to images or videos. Matches are automatically sorted and categorized.

Bishop said the software is extremely accurate and tested often to eliminate the potential for mistakes or computer error.

© 2008 Sun Media Corporation. All rights reserved.