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NORTH CAROLINA MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO POSSESSING CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

WASHINGTON – Timothy Christenbury, of Charlotte, N.C., pleaded guilty today to possessing child pornography, Acting Assistant Attorney General of the Criminal Division Rita M. Glavin and U.S. Attorney for the Western District of North Carolina Gretchen C.F. Shappert announced.

Christenbury, 46, pleaded guilty before U.S. Magistrate Judge Carl Horn III to one count of possession of child pornography. He was indicted on those charges on Dec. 16, 2008. According to the indictment, Christenbury possessed computer files containing child pornography from on or about Sept. 2 to Sept. 4, 2007.

Christenbury was identified through “Operation Joint Hammer” – the U.S. component of an ongoing global enforcement operation targeting transnational rings of child pornographers. The operation already has led to the arrest of more than 60 people in the United States involved in the trade of child pornography.

Operation Joint Hammer was initiated through evidence developed by European law enforcement and shared with U.S. counterparts by Europol and Interpol. The European portion of this global enforcement effort, “Operation Koala,” was launched after the discovery of a handful of people in Europe who were molesting children and producing photographs of that abuse for commercial gain. Further investigation unveiled a number of online child pornography rings – some of which hosted dangerous offenders who not only traded child pornography, but who themselves sexually abused children. Law enforcement has determined that the customers of the Web site were located in nearly 30 countries around the world, including the United States.

Christenbury faces a maximum of 10 years in prison, forfeiture of all seized property, and up to a \$250,000 fine. Christenbury also will face the imposition of supervised release following his release from prison for a term of at least five years to life.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Cortney Escaravage and Kimlani Ford of the Western District of North Carolina and Trial Attorney Alecia Riewerts Wolak of the Criminal Division’s Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section. The investigation is being handled by Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

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