



Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
TUESDAY, JUNE 15, 2010
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CALIFORNIA MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO PRODUCTION OF CHILD PORNOGRAPHY AND INTERNATIONAL CHILD PORNOGRAPHY CONSPIRACY CASE

WASHINGTON – Richard Schweich of San Jose, Calif., pleaded guilty today to conspiring to advertise and distribute child pornography and producing child pornography, Assistant Attorney General Lanny A. Breuer of the Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney Timothy M. Morrison of the Southern District of Indiana and U.S. Attorney Joseph P. Russoniello of the Northern District of California announced.

Schweich, 40, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Court Judge William T. Lawrence in Indianapolis to one count of conspiracy to advertise child pornography, one count of conspiracy to distribute child pornography, 13 counts of advertising child pornography and two counts of distributing child pornography. He was indicted on those charges on June 3, 2009, in a second superseding indictment in the Southern District of Indiana.

Schweich also pleaded guilty today to a criminal information filed on March 29, 2010, in the Northern District of California, charging him with one count of producing child pornography. According to court documents filed in the Northern District of California, Schweich produced sexually explicit photographs of an eleven year-old girl in January 2008.

At sentencing, in conjunction with the terms of a plea agreement, Schweich faces 25 and 35 years in prison, a fine of \$250,000 and a lifetime term of supervised release following his prison term.

The child pornography conspiracy and production charges against Schweich are a result of “Operation Nest Egg,” an ongoing and joint investigation led by the Criminal Division’s Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section (CEOS), the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of Indiana, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Operation Nest Egg, launched in February 2008, targeted Schweich and 25 co-defendants charged in the Southern District of Indiana, as well as approximately 500 additional individuals located throughout the world for their involvement in an online group dedicated to trading images of child pornography.

According to court documents filed in the Southern District of Indiana, the 26 co-conspirators participated in a sophisticated, password-protected Internet bulletin board group, which existed to allow members to meet like-minded individuals with a sexualized interest in children, to discuss that interest and to trade images of child pornography. The defendants are charged with conspiring to advertise and distribute child pornography, along with substantive counts of advertising and distributing child pornography. Twenty-two of the 26 defendants charged in the conspiracy have been arrested. Twenty of the 22 individuals arrested have been convicted or have pleaded guilty. Four of the 26 individuals charged in the conspiracy remain at large and are known only by their online identities. Efforts to identify and apprehend these four individuals continue.

To date, as a result of Operation Nest Egg, more than 80 searches have been conducted in the United States. In total, more than 50 individuals have been arrested and 38 individuals have been convicted. The investigation is ongoing.

Numerous members of the Internet-based bulletin board were found to have been personally sexually abusing children, sometimes producing images of the sexual abuse. Thus far, 16 child victims have been identified through Operation Nest Egg. For example, the charge of production of child pornography that Richard Schweich pleaded guilty to in federal court today came as a result of an extensive investigation conducted by USPIS and the San Jose Police Department, ultimately leading to the identification of the 11 year-old girl victim depicted in the sexually explicit photographs.

This case was brought as part of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative to combat the growing epidemic of child sexual exploitation and abuse, launched in May 2006 by the Department of Justice. Led by U.S. Attorneys' Offices and the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section (CEOS), Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state and local resources to better locate, apprehend and prosecute individuals who exploit children via the Internet, as well as to identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit www.projectsafechildhood.gov.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Steven D. DeBrotta of the Southern District of Indiana, Assistant U.S. Attorney Hanley Chew of the Northern District of California and CEOS Trial Attorney Alecia Riewerts Wolak. The investigation was conducted by USPIS and the San Jose Police Department.

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