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Utah Man Sentenced to 24 Months in Prison for Bringing Down Wireless Internet Services

WASHINGTON – A man skilled in the operation of commercial wireless Internet networks was sentenced today for intentionally bringing down wireless Internet services across the region of Vernal, Utah, the Justice Department announced today.

Ryan Fisher, 24, of Vernal, was sentenced to 24 months in prison to be followed by 36 months of supervised release for intentionally damaging a protected computer. U.S. District Judge Paul G. Cassell also ordered the defendant to pay $65,000 in restitution.

Fisher was charged on Feb. 15, 2006, in a one-count criminal indictment. The defendant worked for SBT Internet, which provided Internet service to residential and business customers around Vernal using wireless radio signals between SBT's radio towers and its customers' wireless access points.

Fisher left SBT over business and financial disputes and went on to work for, and eventually own, another Internet service provider in the area. Fisher admitted that he then used SBT's computer passwords to take control of SBT's network and reprogram its customers' wireless access points to cut off their Internet service, including the service of one customer who was relying on electronic mail for news of an organ donor. He intentionally reprogrammed the access points to complicate SBT's repair efforts which resulted in jammed wireless Internet airwaves that affected others outside SBT's network, including another wireless Internet service and its customers. In total, more than 170 customers lost Internet service, some of them for as long as three weeks, and collectively caused more than $65,000 in losses.

The case was investigated by the FBI. The case was prosecuted by Senior Counsel Scott L. Garland and Trial Attorney Josh Goldfoot of the Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section and Assistant U.S. Attorneys Leshia Lee-Dixon and Jonathan Boyd of the District of Utah.

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