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Disgruntled Phillies Fan/Spammer Sent to Prison for Four Years

United States Attorney Patrick L. Meehan today announced that the Hon. Berle A. Schiller imposed a sentence of four years imprisonment on Allan Eric Carlson. Carlson had been convicted of 79 counts of computer fraud and identity fraud. Carlson was a dissatisfied Philadelphia Phillies fan and to convey his dissatisfaction to the world, hacked into computers belonging to many individuals and from them launched hundreds of thousands of spam e-mails complaining about the Phillies. When he launched these e-mails, he faked, or "spoofed," the "From" line of the e-mail, using the e-mail addresses of writers at the Philadelphia Daily News and the Philadelphia Inquirer. He also used e-mail addresses belonging to the Philadelphia Phillies and writers at The Sporting News, Fox Sports, ESPN, and officials at Knight Ridder, the parent company of the Inquirer and Daily News. This made it appear as if the e-mails had come from these writers.

The testimony at the trial showed that because many of the e-mail addresses that Carlson sent his messages to were no longer valid, tens of thousands of e-mails were "returned" to the e-mail boxes of the persons whose addresses were spoofed.

"These were electronic attacks with serious consequences," said Meehan, who created a separate Computer Crime section in his office in 2001. "By flooding the victim computer systems with spam e-mails, those systems and the businesses they support were severely affected."

The Inquirer, Daily News, and the Phillies promptly reported these attacks to the FBI, which was able to enlist its offices throughout the nation and conduct a thorough investigation.

Some of the changes created by the USA-Patriot Act permitted the U.S. Attorney's Office to subpoena information from various Internet Service Providers. The voluntary cooperation of Cogeco Cable in Burlington, Ontario, Canada provided the most crucial piece of evidence. When Cogeco learned that one of its customer's computers was being used to launch a spam attack, Cogeco quickly traced the attack and helped lead investigators to Mr. Carlson.

Meehan noted that Internet security is everyone's responsibility. Carlson was able to get into computers because many people had created home networks with proxy servers. The victims here did nothing to make their proxy servers secure. As a result Carlson was able to use their computers to launch his e-mail attacks.

Meehan also thanked the Canadian Department of Justice, the Ministry of the Attorney General for the Province of Ontario, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for their assistance.

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