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U.S. Department of Justice
District of Utah
Paul M. Warner
United States Attorney
Contact: Melodie Rydalch
Office: 801-325-3206
Cell: 801-243-6475

Utah Man Charged with Bringing Down Wireless Internet Services in Vernal Region

SALT LAKE CITY --- A man skilled in the operation of commercial wireless Internet networks faces federal charges today alleging he intentionally brought down wireless Internet services in the region of Vernal, Utah.

U.S. Department of Justice Assistant Attorney General Alice Fisher, Acting United States Attorney Stephen J. Sorenson, and Timothy Fuhrman, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Salt Lake City, announced today that Ryan Fisher, age 23, of Vernal, Utah, has been charged in a one-count criminal indictment with intentionally damaging a protected computer. The indictment was returned late Wednesday afternoon.

The indictment alleges that Fisher worked for SBT Internet, a company providing wireless Internet service to residential and commercial customers in and around Vernal, until he left over business and financial disputes. He went on to own another Internet service provider in the area. SBT Internet provides Internet service by means of wireless radio signals sent between SBT's radio towers and wireless access points on its customers' premises.

The indictment alleges that Fisher used SBT's computer passwords to access SBT's network and reprogram its customers' wireless access points so they could not reach the Internet through normal means, including one customer who was relying on electronic mail for news of an organ donor.

The indictment further alleges that Fisher intentionally reprogrammed the access points to complicate SBT's repair efforts and that his conduct resulted in jammed wireless Internet airwaves that affected others outside SBT's network. The indictment finally alleges that SBT Internet and another wireless Internet company in the area suffered financial losses because of the alleged conduct.

If convicted of the charge in the indictment, Fisher faces a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison, to be followed by up to three years of supervised release, a fine of up to $250,000 or twice the monetary gain or loss, and restitution to the victims. He will be issued a summons to appear in U.S. District Court. Defendants charged in indictments are presumed innocent unless or until proven guilty in court.

The case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Jonathan Boyd of the District of Utah and Senior Counsel Scott L. Garland and Trial Attorney Josh Goldfoot of the U.S. Department of Justice's Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section.

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