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United States Department of Justice
United States Attorney
Central District of California
Debra W. Yang

Two Alleged Computer Hackers Charged in Los Angeles as Part of Nationwide 'Operation Cyber Sweep'

As part of a nationwide crackdown on computer hackers and other high-tech criminals, federal authorities in Los Angeles have charged two men with illegally accessing computers. The two cases, which saw significant developments yesterday in United States District Court in Los Angeles, were announced today in conjunction with "Operation Cyber Sweep," which was announced this morning at a press conference in Washington by Attorney General John Ashcroft.

In the first case, former computer technician Walter L. Wiggs has agreed to plead guilty to a computer hacking crime for disrupting the Los Angeles County Department of Child and Family Service's Child Protection Hotline. In a plea agreement filed yesterday, Wiggs, a 44-year-old resident of Douglasville, Georgia, admitted that he brought down the Child Protection Hotline by accessing the computer that controls the Hotline and deleting critical configuration files.

Wiggs gained access to the Los Angeles County system by using information he obtained while employed by Technology for Business Corporation (TFBC), a Manhattan Beach company that developed the interactive voice response software used by the Child Protection Hotline. After Wiggs was laid off by TFBC, he gained unauthorized access to the Hotline's computer system from his home in Georgia and caused the system to crash. From July 1 through July 4, 2003 child abuse victims, police officers, hospitals and mental health workers who called the Child Protection Hotline were unable to speak to an agency official, or their calls were significantly delayed, because of Wiggs' hacking crime.

In addition to the Los Angeles County Child Protection Hotline, Wiggs gained unauthorized access to at least 12 other computer systems that used TFBC's interactive voice response software, including systems used by the City of San Diego, the City of Modesto and the Orange County District Attorney's Office.

Wiggs was arrested at his residence in Georgia by special agents with the Federal Bureau of Investigation on August 22. He has agreed to plead guilty to the charge contained in an indictment that was returned by a federal grand jury in Los Angeles on September 12. Wiggs is expected to plead guilty in United States District Court in Atlanta within the next several weeks. As a result of his anticipated guilty plea, Wiggs faces a maximum possible sentence of five years in federal prison and a $250,000 fine.

In the second case, a Southern California man was charged yesterday with using knowledge he obtained while working at an Arizona automobile dealer to access credit histories and use that data to commit identity theft.

Raul “James” Ramirez, 23, of Bellflower, is charged in a criminal complaint with intentionally accessing a computer without authorization and obtaining information from a consumer credit agency. Ramirez was arrested by special agents with the FBI on November 12 when they executed a search warrant at his residence. Ramirez was wanted by authorities in Arizona because he allegedly escaped from jail in Kingman, where he was serving a sentence for disorderly conduct/fighting, which included domestic violence.

After his escape in 2003, Ramirez gained unauthorized access to the computers of NowCom, a Los Angeles company that provides car dealerships with online access to credit histories so they can make decisions related to automobile financing. Ramirez, a former employee of the Automart in Kingman, Arizona, used his knowledge of the NowCom system to download without authorization the credit histories of numerous individuals for use in identity fraud.

Ramirez was extradited to Arizona after his arrest, but he is expected to return to federal court in Los Angeles when he finishes serving his term of imprisonment in Arizona.

These cases are the result of investigations by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. CONTACT: Assistant United States Attorney Arif Alikhan (Wiggs case)

Chief, Computer Crimes Section

(213) 894-2476 Assistant United States Attorney Wesley Hsu (Ramirez case)

(213) 894-3045 Release No. 03-162

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