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**Press Release**  
**For Immediate Release**  
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**Washington D.C.**  
**FBI National Press Office**  
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Operation Candyman

The FBI today announced that more than 89 persons in over 20 states have been charged in the first phase of a nationwide crackdown on the proliferation of child pornography via the Internet. During the course of this investigative initiative, known as "Operation Candyman," over 266 searches have been conducted, with more searches anticipated. To date, 27 persons have been arrested and admitted to the prior molestation of over 36 children. More arrests are anticipated during the week and in coming months. Individuals identified as subjects in "Operation Candyman" include Little League coaches, a teacher's aide, a guidance counselor, school bus driver, foster care parent and professionals in the medical, educational, military and law enforcement fields.

"Operation Candyman demonstrates our commitment to protecting our nation's children from sexual predators. The FBI's investigation has already resulted in the arrests of many individuals who have targeted children as their victims. This extensive operation should serve as a warning to others that we will find and prosecute those who target and endanger our children," Attorney General John Ashcroft said.

FBI Director Robert S. Mueller said, "The FBI will diligently pursue and arrest those individuals who exploit our children by distributing, producing and exchanging child pornographic images."

"Operation Candyman" should serve as an example that the FBI will not tolerate the collectors and distributors of child pornography who continue to exploit our children," Mueller said. "We will diligently shut down any and

all websites, Egroups, bulletin boards, and any other mediums that will foster the continued exploitation of our children."

Egroups, maintained by Yahoo, allow individuals to correspond with like-minded persons via email, chat, bulletin boards, and file transfers. "Operation Candyman," named after its Egroup Uniform Resource Locator, (URL), [www.egroups.com/groups/thecandyman](http://www.egroups.com/groups/thecandyman) was a yearlong undercover operation conducted by the FBI's Houston Child Exploitation Task Force and the United States Attorney's Office, Southern District of Texas. The task force is comprised of select investigators from the FBI and the Houston Police Department. The Candyman Egroup allowed collectors and distributors of child pornography to use online resources to retrieve and distribute child pornography.

All 56 FBI field offices, nearly every U.S. Attorney's Office across the country, and the Department of Justice's Criminal Division, through its Child Exploitation & Obscenity Section, have participated extensively in this investigation in an effort to identify members of the Candyman Egroup, and will continue an aggressive investigation until all identified perpetrators have been successfully arrested and prosecuted. In addition to the Candyman Egroup, the FBI has initiated investigations into other Egroups that facilitated the distribution, production and exchange of child pornography. It is estimated there were over 7,000 members of the Candyman Egroup, with some 2,400 residing in foreign countries.

Executive Assistant Director Bruce J. Gebhardt, Criminal Investigative Division, said FBI field offices carried out "Operation Candyman " in concert with local and state law enforcement agencies around the country. "Without the continued support of local and state law enforcement, it would be difficult for the FBI to combat such an enormous tasking of this magnitude," Gebhardt said.

To combat the proliferation of online child sexual exploitation, the FBI established a nationwide initiative code named "Innocent Images." The Innocent Images initiative is composed of 23 task forces in 56 FBI field offices around the country, their sole investigative purpose is to investigate and eradicate online sexual exploitation of children and the production and distribution of child pornography.

Since their inception in 1995, Innocent Images task forces have initiated over 5,700 investigations and have arrested and convicted over 3,000 persons. The task forces are made up of FBI, state and local law enforcement, United States Attorneys, and other federal and state

agencies. At FBI Headquarters, Criminal Investigative Division, Crimes Against Children Unit, coordinated "Operation Candyman."