

<http://www.usps.com/postalinspectors/avalanch.htm>

# **The U.S. Postal Inspection Service Teams With Internet Crimes Against Children Task Forces in Operation Avalanche**

Attorney General John Ashcroft and then-Chief Postal Inspector Kenneth Weaver announced in August 2001 the successful conclusion of a two-year investigation that dismantled the largest commercial child pornography enterprise ever uncovered. Following the "take down" of Landslide Productions, Inc., a multimillion-dollar child pornography business, 30 federally funded ICAC task forces throughout the United States partnered with U.S. Postal Inspectors to launch Operation Avalanche. This proactive, undercover investigation resulted in an unprecedented sentence of life in prison for Landslide's owner, the execution of over 160 state and federal search warrants across the country, the arrest to date of more than 120 offenders for trafficking child pornography via the U.S. Mail and the Internet, the identification of child molesters, and the rescue of child victims.

The Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force Program was created in 1998 by Congressional mandate. Administered and funded through the Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), ICAC provides

grants to state and local law enforcement agencies, which use them to build regional task forces that address and combat Internet-related crimes against children.

Operation Avalanche began in 1999, when Postal Inspectors discovered that a Ft. Worth, Texas, company, Landslide Productions, Inc., operated and owned by Thomas and Janice Reedy, was selling child pornography Web sites. Customers from around the world paid monthly subscription fees via a post office box address or the Internet to access the hundreds of Web sites, which contained extremely graphic child pornography material. Ft. Worth Postal Inspector Robert C. Adams and Dallas ICAC Task Force Detective Steven A. Nelson teamed together to initiate what would become a child exploitation case of unprecedented magnitude.

During the investigation, while Landslide Productions was still in business, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's Cyber Tipline received more than 270 complaints from people around the world related to the Landslide case. All credible complaints were forwarded to investigators.

Postal Inspector Bob Adams obtained federal search warrants for the business and personal residence of the Reedy's. The warrants were executed by a task force of 45 officers and agents. They served seizure warrants on Landslide's bank accounts and two unencumbered Mercedes Benz vehicles valued at more than \$150,000—and purchased with the Reedy's ill-gotten gains. Landslide was a highly successful financial enterprise, at one point taking in over \$1.4 million in a single month.

After reviewing volumes of seized evidence and subpoenaed financial records, the Reedy's were indicted in federal district court on 89 counts of conspiracy to distribute child pornography and possession of child pornography. Following a one-week jury trial,

the Reedy's and their company were convicted on all counts as charged. Thomas Reedy was given an unprecedented sentence of life in prison, and his wife Janice received a 14-year prison sentence.

Putting Landslide Productions out of business and the Reedys behind bars struck a major blow to the global child pornography industry, but the investigation did not end there. Using intelligence gained from Landslide's customer database, Postal Inspectors joined with 30 federally funded ICAC task forces across the country and, with legal guidance from the Department of Justice's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, designed and implemented a nationally coordinated, undercover operation.

Working out of the Dallas ICAC Task Force office, Postal Inspectors and other investigators initiated undercover contacts with the most egregious suspects. As cases were developed, the suspects were passed off to other Postal Inspectors and ICAC task forces throughout the United States for further investigation. Investigators obtained and served search warrants, seized huge volumes of child pornography images and materials, identified child molesters, and rescued victimized children from further sexual abuse. To date, over 160 search warrants have been served and more than 120 child sex offenders and pornographers have been arrested.

In one instance, Postal Inspectors and ICAC Task Force investigators searching the home of a 36-year-old computer consultant in North Carolina found videotapes he had produced depicting the sexual abuse of a number of young girls, one of whom was only four years old. The offender recorded the activities with a pinhole camera he had hidden in a bedroom smoke detector and which was connected to a VCR and a computer. On August 7, 2001, the man was sentenced to 17 and 1/2 years in federal prison on various charges of sexual exploitation.

The Internet has not only cut across global boundaries, it has cut across jurisdictional lines. Few cases that originate on the Internet remain in the same jurisdiction—nearly all cross state lines and involve multiple jurisdictions at federal and state levels, with extensive interagency collaborations. Operation Avalanche exemplifies law enforcement teamwork at its best. Over 60 foreign countries and their citizens have benefited from this cooperation, which has identified thousands of suspected child pornographers and molesters around the globe and continues to track down and halt these criminals.