

EDUCATION AND COLLABORATION NEEDED TO ADDRESS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE WEBSITES

by Signy Arnason

The Canadian Centre for Child Protection has released a new study titled *Child Sexual Abuse Images: An analysis of websites by Cybertip.ca*. The study reinforces concerns regarding the scope and severity of child sexual abuse imagery and underscores the need for additional solutions.

The report was based on the examination of nearly 16,000 incidents involving sites hosting child pornography and the analysis of more than 4,000 unique images of child sexual abuse. More than 82% of the images assessed by Cybertip.ca depicted very young, pre-pubescent children under 12 years of age. Most concerning was the severe abuse depicted, with more than 35% of all images showing serious sexual assaults.

“What makes this particularly concerning is the very young age of the children in the images. These children are most likely being accessed and sexually abused by someone they know. Not only is it devastating for a child to be abused, but to have the abuse recorded and distributed on the Internet adds another layer of trauma,” said Lianna McDonald, Executive Director of the Canadian Centre for Child Protection. “This is a call to action to all Canadians to learn to recognize the signs of abuse, and to report their suspicions of abuse. We need to disrupt and hopefully stop child sexual abuse and prevent it from being memorialized and traded on the Internet.”

The report emphasizes the critical need for child sexual abuse education. Special attention should be given to educating children 12 years and under on this subject to help build their skills and confidence to possibly disrupt and disclose abuse. Building public awareness on the issue of child sexual abuse and encouraging adults to report is another highlighted outcome.

The study also provides an in-depth analysis of reports made by the public to Cybertip.ca. As a result of this analysis, a series of twelve recommendations were provided to assist educators, policy makers and other stakeholders who are working to reduce the online sexual exploitation of children.

“This report clearly reiterates the importance of a national tipline through which members of the public can actively participate in child protection by reporting IT-enabled child sexual exploitation,” said Superintendent John Bilinski, of the Canadian Police Centre for Missing and Exploited Children. “As a partner of the Canadian Police Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, Cybertip.ca plays a key triage role that allows police to focus their efforts on investigations while ensuring that the public receives accurate awareness and prevention information. This increased understanding enhances our collective ability to protect children.”

At the time of the analysis, more than 60 countries were hosting child sexual abuse content. Additionally, in one 48 hour period, Cybertip.ca observed a website cycle through 212 unique IP addresses, located in 16 different countries.

“We know from our 35 hotlines around the world the challenges in addressing illegal website content. Offenders are taking full advantage of the architecture of the Internet, variances in legislation, and are deliberately moving sites to evade the law,” says Ruben Rodriguez, President of Inhope (International Hotline Association). “International collaboration involving a variety of stakeholders is the only way we are going to successfully tackle Internet-facilitated crimes against children.”

In addition, the study, which was done in partnership with Bell Canada, provides information on the global movement of child sexual abuse websites, identifies the challenges with the borderless nature of the Internet, and recommends additional solutions for tackling this problem.

Solutions to accurately identify those who operate these child abuse websites include working with the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) to adopt standards for ensuring the validity of the registrant’s personal information. This is one of the twelve recommendations identified in the report.

Cybertip.ca is Canada’s tipline for reporting the online sexual exploitation of children. The tipline is

part of the Government of Canada’s National Strategy to Protect Children from Sexual Exploitation on the Internet. Since its launch, Cybertip.ca has received close to 40,000 reports resulting in at least 52 arrests and the removal of numerous children from abusive environments. In partnership with Bell Canada, Cybertip.ca’s Research Series pulls together the most crucial aspects of the tens of thousands of reports submitted by the Canadian public. This report is the first in a series that will include the publication of unique research in the area of online child sexual exploitation, and will promote the creation of best practices for child protection in Canada.

To access a full copy of the report, the summary report, or backgrounders on the report’s keys statistics, recommendations and priorities for education, please visit the Canadian Centre’s website at: www.protectchildren.ca or the national tipline at: www.cybertip.ca.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The report presents a series of twelve recommendations in the areas of education and public awareness, technical and policy development, and research opportunities.

- The creation of educational materials for children 12 years and under in order to help young children recognize signs of the abuse process and disclose to a trusted adult if they are being abused or photographed inappropriately. Adults also need to learn to recognize the possible signs of abuse. Tools should be provided to caregivers in the areas of healthy parenting and understanding and recognizing the signs of abuse.
- Collaboration between tiplines such as Cybertip.ca around the world to begin tracking infants and toddlers in child abuse imagery to allow a better idea if there is

a growing audience for images of very young children being abused. This will also open a dialogue about prevention strategies to better protect pre-school children.

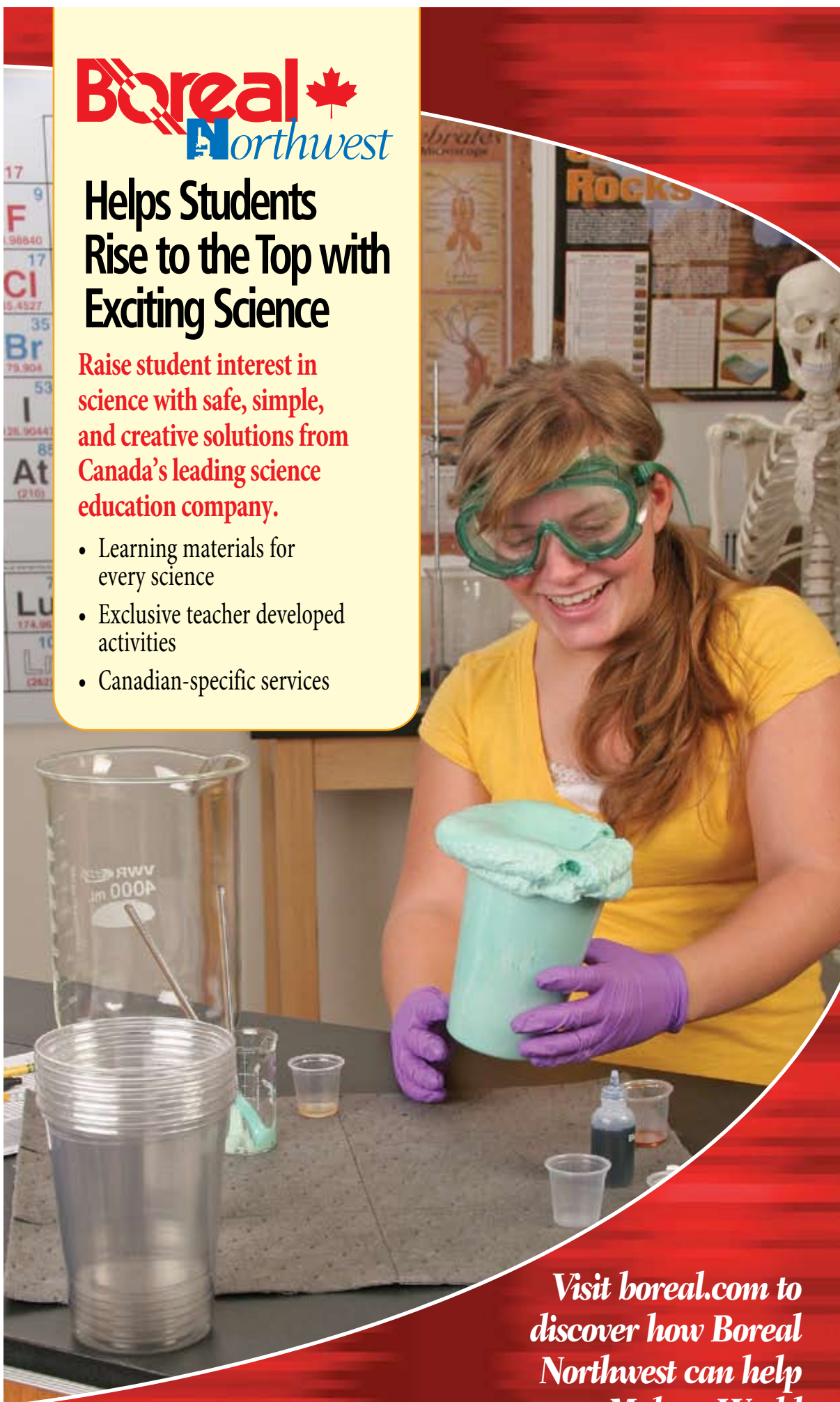
- Creation of gender-related educational materials in response to the large percentage of girls depicted in abuse imagery.
- Working with law enforcement and Internet service and content providers to remove illegal content from Canadian servers.
- Establishing international standards for the personal information a registrant is required to provide when registering a new domain name.
- Partnering with domain name registrants to have domains hosting illegal content discarded from use so new website owners cannot purchase domains known to host child pornography and reuse it for the same purpose.
- Need for further research on the impact of child sexual abuse on victims and whether the Internet has changed the nature and extent of their trauma and healing process.
- Collaboration and data sharing between organizations dealing with online sexual exploitation of children.
- Research is needed to determine how words are being used on websites hosting online sexual abuse images.
- Track the use of unique title bars on websites hosting child abuse images.
- Establish a coalition of stakeholders such as law enforcement, the financial industry and Internet service providers, to develop solutions to the commercial aspects of child sexual abuse images.
- When a site has been identified as fast flux (ever-changing network of compromised hosts acting as proxies) it is possible to determine which IP addresses are being used to serve the content, which means tiplines around the world could work with Internet service providers to notify them of compromised computers on their network. Internet service providers could choose to suspend the customer's service until the infected machine is fixed.



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