

START

update



The FBI's Candyman Cases Go Sour

The child-porn dragnet known as Operation Candyman—touted as one of the FBI's success stories last year—got rolling when the Feds raided more than 700 homes in the US. The justification for the bureau's search warrants? An agent's affidavit swearing that all members of a free Yahoo! group had opted to receive illegal images via email.

In fact, most of the targeted members had opted out, leaving the FBI with little more probable cause for search than an email address, which anyone on the Net could have entered ("The United States of America v. Adam Vaughn," *Wired* 10.10). In March, two federal judges tossed out evidence in Candyman cases with sharp rebukes for the FBI's "reckless disregard for the truth" and assault on privacy. St. Louis District Judge Catherine Perry ruled the government's position is the equivalent of saying that if someone subscribes to a drug legalization newsletter, "there is probable cause to believe that person possesses drugs."

While the judges' statements cast light into a shadowy area of law enforcement, they may not help the scores of defendants—like Adam Vaughn—who pled guilty and signed away their right to appeal for a promise of a lighter sentence.

— Steve Silberman



SATELLITES

Oh, Nooo! What If GPS Fails?

John Petersen doesn't like surprises, but he studies them for a living. The director of the Arlington Institute, a scenario-planning outfit in Virginia, helps the government think about the unthinkable. His latest inquiry: What if the US Global Positioning System stopped working?

It's not as far-fetched as it might sound. Eighteen of the 28 satellites in the GPS constellation are operating past their intended lifespan or suffering from equipment failure. There have been three launch incidents in the past five years, and the Air Force, which maintains the 20-year-old network, is overburdened with competing space priorities.

Given the circumstances, planners are concerned with the system's health. "If GPS were to fail completely, the cost would be incalculable," Petersen says. "Civil aviation, trucking, shipping, and telecommunications would be worst hit, but countless other industries would be affected." Internet activity would slow to a crawl, because many backbone operators rely on precise GPS time stamps to route data. Agribusiness and commercial fishing could be blinded, causing food prices to skyrocket. The \$12 billion market for GPS devices would be sent reeling, and the arrival of location-based wireless services would be set back years.

Pentagon officials insist the situation isn't all that dire. GPS can withstand the loss of several satellites before becoming completely dysfunctional, says Owen Wormser, who oversees space communications issues from his post in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of

Defense. "If it ever came to it, the system would degrade slightly, rather than seize up," he says. Indeed, the Air Force has 13 replacement satellites in the pipeline (though at this point it doesn't have the Delta rockets on hand to send them into orbit). The Air Force did launch a new satellite in February, hurrying it into service in half the usual time.

Wormser looks forward to the day when the next generation of GPS technology is put into place—and paid for by the private sector, which accounts for 90 percent of the system's usage. "With so many vested commercial interests, why shouldn't industry chip in?" Wormser asks. He's pushing a subscription-based model in which the military would provide commercial GPS services. The system would be administered by a civilian agency, which would coordinate with industry.

Before that can happen, though, the long-awaited GPS III must get off the ground. Its satellites will feature stronger, jam-proof signals, more precision, and greater reliability. But federal budget cutbacks have postponed the first launch of this constellation until 2012. Meanwhile, the European Union is drafting plans for its own system, Galileo, which would provide similar commercial services by 2008. Wormser doubts the Europeans, who've missed past deadlines, can deliver by then. Still, he says, "the longer we continue to support the current system, the worse we'll be in the long run." Maybe a little failure wouldn't be such a bad thing after all.

— Andrew Zolli

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