



Combating online child sexual abuse

VIRTUAL GLOBAL TASKFORCE

The Virtual Global Taskforce (VGT), an international collaboration of law enforcement agencies, NGOs and industry partners, has the sole objective to protect children from online sexual exploitation and transnational sex offences. Its strategic goals include supporting the private sector to improve its protective security by sharing intelligence on the threat to children from online sexual exploitation and abuse.

It is important to emphasise that the priority of law enforcement globally, including those that are members of the VGT, is always sharply focused on the victims of this crime. Those victims suffer not only from the actual physical effects of sexual abuse per se but also, repeatedly through the creation, distribution and circulation of child sexual exploitation materials (including images, videos, and written words) of their abuse. Many victims have stated that the continued circulation of their sexual abuse has debilitating and humiliating consequences for them, which continue throughout their adult lives. Locating victims so that they can be removed from harm, and being able to prevent the re-circulation of child sexual exploitation materials (CSEM), are positive steps for service providers toward preventing re-victimisation at various levels. Further, preventing children from becoming victims by detecting language patterns that indicate they are being groomed or solicited for the sharing of CSEM is also welcomed since it enables the detection of offending behaviour while preventing it from becoming hands on sexual exploitation, at least in some cases. Finally, preventing children from being forced into producing additional CSEM through the re-circulation of self-produced images, protecting them from the associated emotional turmoil and trauma is a constructive use of technology. The VGT is familiar with the technologies used to achieve these aims and the effect on victims of the re-circulation of CSEM through its private sector partners who implement them in their systems and our NGO partners efforts in working with those most affected by this crime.

Industry's proactive prevention methods include use of software and hash lists to identify known CSEM to prevent offenders from uploading material that has already been identified as criminal. They can carry out this work without seeing the content of users' communication in a similar way to how anti-virus software is deployed. Some companies also use URL block lists to prevent users from purposefully or accidentally accessing CSEM and they work closely with international hotlines to support companies to remove this illegal content from their domains and infrastructure. Overall, the steps industry takes are carefully balanced with the need to protect users privacy whilst also prioritising the safeguarding of children.

As a network of law enforcement agencies fully committed to guarantee and ensure the rule of law, the VGT commends our industry partners who are working to proactively support the efforts to protect children from online child sexual exploitation globally

Thank you for your consideration.

Chief Superintendent Marie-Claude Arsenault, Royal Canadian Mounted Police
VGT Chair