

DHS erroneously seizes 84,000 domains, falsely accuses them of trafficking in child porn

Cory Doctorow at 9:14 AM Thursday, Feb 17, 2011

The DHS's Immigration and Customs Enforcement department has lately claimed for itself the right to seize and shutter domain names without substantial due process. Unsurprisingly, it is now making enormous, crushing errors as it exercises its self-appointed role as domain cop. The latest bungle? Erroneously shutting down 84,000 domains and replacing their content with a warning accusing them and their visitors of trafficking in child porn.



The domain in question is mooo.com, which belongs to the DNS provider FreeDNS. It is the most popular shared domain at afraid.org and as a result of the authorities' actions a massive 84,000 subdomains were wrongfully seized as well. All sites were redirected to the banner below.

The FreeDNS owner was taken by surprise and quickly released the following statement on their website. "Freedns.afraid.org has never allowed this type of abuse of its DNS service. We are working to get the issue sorted as quickly as possible."

Eventually, on Sunday the domain seizure was reverted and the subdomains slowly started to point to the old sites again instead of the accusatory banner. However, since the DNS entries have to propagate, it took another 3 days before the images disappeared completely.

Most of the subdomains in question are personal sites and sites of small businesses. A search on Bing still shows how innocent sites were claimed to promote child pornography. A rather damaging accusation, which scared and upset many of the site's owners.

U.S. Government Shuts Down 84,000 Websites, 'By Mistake'

EFF on US domain copyright seizures - Boing Boing
DHS relied on bizarre legal reasoning and crappy evidence to seize ...

Wikileaks.org domain 'killed' - Boing Boing
Official "This website seized by feds" graphic - Boing Boing

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29 Comments • Add a comment

bobthecitizen

#1 • 9:20 AM, Feb 17 • Reply

I would tend to suspect DHS and more so, TSA, of being the sort to store pictures of naked children.

CHild pornography is a nasty, bad, thing. But what about "innocent until proven guilty"? Is this not punishment prior to trial?

Welcome to Egypt folks.

johnofjack

#2 • 9:34 AM, Feb 17 • Reply

ICE is just bad news, period. They take somebody as an illegal immigrant, that person just disappears--incommunicado, no counsel, nothing which might be mistaken for due process--and they know it's "disappearing" people and use that language on purpose, apparently ignorant of Argentinian history. (Or maybe not, maybe it takes the wrinkles out of their pants that they have such uncontested unaccountable power.)

jessemoya

#3 • 9:37 AM, Feb 17 • Reply

Are you serious? Public accusations of trafficking in child pornography without any investigation or evidence? I'd want someone's job for that. Unless I was one of DOZENS OF THOUSANDS of affected websites, in which case I'd want someone's job, their supervisor's job, and plenty of damages.

GeekMan

#4 • 9:40 AM, Feb 17 • Reply

I hate to advocate such things, but I think a class-action lawsuit is in order to remind certain persons at the DHS to use their powers a little more carefully.

dainel

#5 • 9:44 AM, Feb 17 • Reply

Wasn't there something about taking away control of the Internet (at least the domain names part) away from the US govt and putting it under the UN?

Do all of us, living out of the US, get to live under US laws, and yet do not get representatives to vote on those laws? What happened to democracy?

howaboutthisdangit

#6 • 9:49 AM, Feb 17 • Reply

Wait, if the Feds are going after child porn, aren't they neglecting their duties as thugs for the MPAA and RIAA? Their overlords will not be pleased.

I got a chuckle the other day when I heard that Secretary of State Clinton is pressing other nations to keep the Internet free and open.

Welcome to the "Land of the Free." (nudge nudge, wink wink)

Anon

#7 • 9:49 AM, Feb 17 • Reply

What happened to democracy?
It was sold at the highest price.

DieFem

#8 • 9:57 AM, Feb 17 • Reply

First shoot, then ask. It's a nice policy for the "Land Of the Free" as howaboutthisdangit mentioned.

Anon

#9 • 9:57 AM, Feb 17 • Reply

The Government is not immune to law suits. I urge any owner wrongly accused of having a smut-page to seek the services of a good civil rights lawyer with experience in the Federal Court.

lasttide

#10 • 10:01 AM, Feb 17 • Reply

This is just begging for a lawsuit. It's a clear cut 4th Ammendment violation.

Anon

#11 • 10:54 AM, Feb 17 • Reply

Disbarring the judge who signed this should be the first priority. If he can never work again, that will cause a chilling effect next time a judge is asked to sign an order such as this. After that, class action against the government or prosecuting them for libel should be next. Please, if there are lawyers or organizations that focus on this type of thing, here's your chance to beat up the ICE and get a nice paycheck at the same time!!!

Avram / Moderator

#12 • 11:02 AM, Feb 17 • Reply

I'm thinking a false accusation of trafficking in kiddie porn is pretty clear grounds for a libel or defamation lawsuit, in addition to any unlawful seizure issues.

CastanhasDoPara in reply to bobthecitizen

#13 • 11:25 AM, Feb 17 • Reply

Welcome to Egypt... a couple of weeks ago. They actual did something about oppressive government BS.

If only people in the US had the balls to put down the big-gulp and playstation for one damn minute and actually DO something about this quickly blooming police-state.

Also, yes these people should sue the pants off of the libelous jerk-wads. Too bad the damage is done and it would take years for this sort of case to wind its way through the courts.

fnc

#14 • 12:38 PM, Feb 17 • Reply

I predict some lawyers are going to get very rich due to this.

mdh in reply to Avram / Moderator

#15 • 1:36 PM, Feb 17 • Reply

Yeah, home feels real safe now. Thanks DHS!

lpo in reply to johnofjack

#16 • 2:06 PM, Feb 17 • Reply

I have been disappeared by ICE. It is even less fun than you think. Did you know they transport prisoners in little metal boxes?

Anon

#17 • 2:11 PM, Feb 17 • Reply

still feel like you live in the land of the free? how much of your freedom will you give up for the illusion of safety?

Cowicide

#18 • 2:51 PM, Feb 17 • Reply

without substantial due process.

Due process?! That' sympathizing with terrorists! This is the USA, only radicals still believe in due process.

America... FUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUU.....

In before someone says the terrorists won. They didn't. The corporatists did. There's tremendous money in security theatre folks. And you're paying for that instead of health care for our citizenry. Americans are embarrassing.

bobthecitizen said:

Welcome to Egypt folks.

Egyptians have got us beat. At least the citizens there still fight for their freedom. The American public is sedated as long as Cheetos and American Idol are in good supply. Cut that off, and some might even fart and nap in protest.

Unfair Robot in reply to dainel

#19 • 3:10 PM, Feb 17 • Reply

> What happened to democracy?

I was going to respond wittily with: "You can read all about it at democracy.gov".

Then I wondered whether that domain actually did exist, so I checked: it does, and it redirects to america.gov.

In the context of this story: WIN.

Anon

#20 • 3:38 PM, Feb 17 • Reply

more poignantly sad than win, imo.

tim

#21 • 5:17 PM, Feb 17 • Reply

In before someone says the terrorists won. They didn't. The corporatists did.

The two are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Cowicide in reply to tim

#22 • 5:30 PM, Feb 17 • Reply

right on!

zyodei in reply to GeekMan

#23 • 5:45 PM, Feb 17 • Reply

Except that it's the US government that did this - so the people who did it would not pay the money, but merely the taxpayers. Those responsible will probably be promoted.

That's what happens when, for instance, a cop shoots some innocent person - they sue, the court awards a judgment and, tralala, the taxpayers pay out millions of dollars.

BastardNamban #24 • 7:29 PM, Feb 17 • Reply

WHAT THE HELL is the Department of Homeland Security doing going after child porn?

Let's get obvious out of the way- everyone hates child porn, except those who go after it. It's universally reviled.

But the fucking DHS has NO LEGAL BEARING TO INVESTIGATE IT!

THIS! This is what civil liberties advocates scream about at the top of our lungs- ends do not justify the means, especially when the ends are utter failure! It's not the child porn I'm worried about out there- it's my government overstepping their bounds, EXACTLY LIKE THIS, to go after things everyone hates, with no legal backing- so they keep creeping very quickly towards investigating you or anyone en masse for whatever the fuck they feel like!

It is not lunacy to scream slippery slope and 1984 here. This is exactly how those things work!

Goddamnit, someone stop these assholes, and throw them in jail already- I'm sick of this shit, it happens every day now. The USA just keeps raping the legal system and overstepping their authority to spy on the populace.

BBNinja in reply to zyodei #25 • 7:56 PM, Feb 17 • Reply

That means the "lucky winners" have a chance to get their tax money back and actually put it to good use! :P

Since DHS is branching out obviously then I think 419 scammers and those people who phish idiot's email so they can then send out notices to all their facebook friend's that they can win a free laptop should be hunted down and punished.

I'm sure DHS won't have any problem getting their powers extended to cover Nigeria.

Anon #26 • 3:19 PM, Feb 18 • Reply

the key to this is "without due process" our government is out of control... time to police the police!!!!

urbanspaceman #27 • 4:06 PM, Feb 18 • Reply

I wonder why the DHS is tasked with policing the trafficking of child pornography and not say, the FBI? Could it be because the FBI has to operate under the rules of due process?

Anon in reply to Cowicide #28 • 11:13 AM, Apr 24 • Reply

You are obviously hiding something if you need to ask for due process.

Anon #29 • 11:31 AM, Apr 24 • Reply

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