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# Undercover cyber war on web child abusers

WASHINGTON – In a normal working day, US criminal investigator Flint Waters will surf the Internet, chat online with someone and exchange photos and videos.

And every so often, Waters goes for stress counselling to try to get some of the images he's seen in a day's work out of his head, because the reality of his line of work is in sharp contrast to the attractive job description.

Waters is an undercover agent who investigates online sex crimes against children. "It's difficult to deal with. We have post-traumatic stress arrangements with an expert to help us to deal with the material we come across," he said.

At a US congressional hearing in Washington earlier this month, Waters described in graphic detail the horrors he has seen as he tracks what officials believe are millions of child sex offenders around the world who thrive in the anonymity of the Internet.

He spoke of a video of a toddler on a changing table who is penet-

**Snip**

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rated by an unknown adult male, of pictures of "a young girl, about six or seven, nude and tied to a chair, who is being sexually assaulted by a dog".

"I've posed as a mother with two-year-olds and had offenders show up to have sex with the two-year-olds," Waters said.

The Internet has made it easier for law enforcement officials to track and arrest would-be child predators, but lack of manpower means only 2% of known offenders are investigated and brought to justice.

"We have licensed 800 investigators around the world who work the system," Waters said.

They are up against a formidable enemy: a map put together with

data supplied by Internet sex crimes investigators around the world showed at least 27 000 computers contained child pornography files in the month of September alone.

"This is a huge problem, the use of the Internet by paedophiles," said Kevin O'Connor, the US Attorney for the state of Connecticut, where a 52-year-old man faces up to life in prison and a \$500 000 fine after he pleaded guilty last week to enticing a minor into sex via the Internet and possession of child pornography.

In Florida, a man was sentenced last week to 15 years in prison for distributing child pornography, including videos of men having intercourse with girls as young as five.

Waters hailed the Internet for giving law enforcement agents "a chance to catch child molesters without them realising we can see what they're doing". But he also said the Internet had made it easier for predators to find their victims and to learn "to do their crimes better and be harder to catch." – *Supa-APP.*

