

US accuses 10 sports websites of piracy links

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A man uses a laptop computer at a wireless cafe. US agents have sidelined 10 websites they said were linking viewers to pirated telecasts of live sporting events including professional basketball, hockey, wrestling, and other sports.

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Federal officers armed with court-issued warrants seized the online domains of Atdhe.net, Channelsurfing.net, HQ-streams.com, HQstreams.net, Firstrow.net, Ilemi.com, Iilemi.com, Iilemii.com, Rojadirecta.org, and Rojadirecta.com.

Visitors to any of the websites were being redirected on Thursday to a notice stating that the particular domain had been seized because of criminal copyright violations punishable by prison time and fines.

Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) teamed with Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) in New York to execute the warrants.

The sites provided illegal access to copyrighted telecasts of the US National Football League; National Basketball Association; the National Hockey League; World Wrestling Entertainment, and the Ultimate Fighting Championship.

US Attorney Preet Bharara urged the court to order the website operators to permanently forfeit the [domain names](#).

The move came less than a week before a US football "Super Bowl" championship game renowned for drawing millions of viewers.

"The illegal streaming of professional sporting events over the Internet deals a financial body blow to the leagues and broadcasters who are forced to pass their losses off to the fans in the form of higher priced tickets and pay-per-view events," Bharara said.

"With the Super Bowl just days away, the seizures of these infringing websites reaffirm our commitment to working with our law enforcement partners to protect copyrighted material and put the people who steal it out of business."

Sports leagues and broadcasters lose millions of dollars annually due to pirated events being streamed on the Internet, according to the seizure affidavit.

"This swift action by our HSI New York special agents and analysts sends a clear message to [website](#) operators who mistakenly believe it's worth the risk to take copyrighted programming and portray it as their own," said ICE Director John Morton.

The websites seized were described as popular "linking" sites that connected people to online venues where pirated sporting and pay-per-view events were hosted.

The move was the latest phase of "Operation in Our Sites," an ongoing investigation into websites that illegally offer copyrighted and counterfeited goods.

US authorities in November shut down 82 websites selling mostly Chinese-made counterfeit goods, including golf clubs, Walt Disney movies, handbags and other items.

Sites targeted include burberryoutletshop.com, cheapscarfshop.com, dvdcollectionsale.com, handbagcom.com, mydreamwatches.com, rapgodfathers.com, sunglasses-mall.com, torrent-finder.com and usaoutlets.net.

"Operation In Our Sites" began in June of last year with the closure of nine websites offering pirated movies.

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