Secure news tip system offered to media

October 15 2013

Newspapers are displayed at a newsstand October 26, 2009 in San Francisco, California

A US press freedom group announced Tuesday it would be offering news organizations access to an open-source whistleblower submission system dubbed "SecureDrop."

The Freedom of the Press Foundation said it has taken charge of what was originally known as the DeadDrop project, developed by the late Internet activist Aaron Swartz.

The foundation will also provide on-site installation and technical support to [news organizations](#) wishing to run the system.

The new system adds to the Wikileaks-style system for anonymous submission of news tips and documents. The Wall Street Journal has its own system, and the New Yorker has an early version of DeadDrop.

The foundation said no security system can ever be 100 percent impenetrable, but this is "the strongest ever made available to media outlets" and "several major news agencies" have agreed to use it.

"We've reached a time in America when the only way the press can assure the anonymity and safety of their sources is not to know who they are," said JP Barlow, co-founder and board member of Freedom of the Press Foundation.

"SecureDrop is where real news can be slipped quietly under the door."

The system was created by Swartz with investigative reporter Kevin Poulsen, using the Python computer language. It accepts messages and documents from the Web and encrypts them for secure storage.

News sources are assigned a unique codename to establish a relationship with the news organization without having to reveal one's true identity or use email, which can be tracked by authorities.

"Journalists are starting to recognize that sophisticated communications security is a key element in the newsgathering process," Freedom of the Press Foundation's chief technology officer Micah Lee said.

"SecureDrop is the safest way we know for an anonymous source to send information to [journalists](#) while protecting their identity."

The announcement comes days after a media watchdog group issued a report saying the war on news leaks by President Barack Obama's administration is becoming a threat to press freedom and democracy.

The Committee to Protect Journalists, in a report based on interviews with dozens of news professionals, said journalists had found news sources afraid to speak to them because of an unprecedented crackdown, in some cases using the 1917 Espionage Act.

"A truly free press hinges on the ability of investigative journalists to build trust with their sources," Freedom of the Press Foundation executive director Trevor Timm said.

© 2013 AFP