

US State Dept. employee faces cyberstalking, hacking charges

May 21 2015, by Jeff Martin

A U.S. State Department employee is accused of sending threatening emails to college-aged women in the U.S. from his computer at the U.S. Embassy in London, authorities said.

A federal complaint unsealed this week in Atlanta states that Michael C. Ford accessed computer accounts of young women to obtain sexually explicit images of them.

In one case, prosecutors, say, Ford posed as a Google employee to obtain the password to an Illinois woman's Google email account.

Prosecutors say Ford then threatened to post the images online unless the women complied with his demands, such as requests that they shoot videos of other women undressing.

Ford is facing charges that include cyberstalking and making interstate threats. Authorities apprehended him last week at Atlanta's airport as he prepared to board a flight back to London after visiting relatives in Georgia.

Two lawyers representing Ford didn't return messages left by The Associated Press Thursday.

Ford is a U.S. citizen who lived in north Georgia before he moved to the United Kingdom in 2005, an affidavit states. Investigators say he began working at the London Embassy in 2009, and lived in South Croydon

outside London.

State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf said Thursday that Ford was a "locally hired, administrative support employee," not a foreign service officer and hasn't been employed at the embassy since Monday.

The FBI this year investigated emails sent to women across the U.S., including an 18-year-old Kentucky woman, court records show.

"I want you to record videos of sexy girls changing. In gyms, clothing stores, pools... You do that, and I disappear," he wrote to an 18-year-old Kentucky woman, who pleaded with him to leave her alone, the affidavit states. Investigators said he sent a follow-up email, saying "OK, time's up. Everything I have will be posted online and sent to your friends. Pictures, name, phone number, home address ... I gave you a chance and you blew it!"

A special agent in the FBI's Chicago field office investigated more emails sent to a 22-year-old Illinois woman, threatening to post sexually explicit photos of her. The court records do not identify the women.

Investigators say Ford obtained her address, where she worked and went to school, and the names of her parents, who received emails from him requesting information about their daughter.

A State Department investigator said a search of Ford's computer at the London Embassy turned up a spreadsheet of about 250 email addresses, some of which are associated with schools such as the University of Michigan.

"I believe that the account holders listed on the spreadsheet are all victims of Ford's criminal activity," the agent wrote in the affidavit.

State Department agents also determined that several of the account holders appear to belong to the same sorority at a college in Indiana, the affidavit states.

Ford remained in custody Thursday. He's scheduled to have a preliminary hearing in U.S. District Court in Atlanta on June 1.

© 2015 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: US State Dept. employee faces cyberstalking, hacking charges (2015, May 21) retrieved 27 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2015-05-state-dept-employee-cyberstalking-hacking.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--