

Murdoch's UK firm pays damages to ex-spy in hacking scandal

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Rupert Murdoch's British newspaper company has agreed to pay damages to a former intelligence officer whose computer was hacked by detectives working for Murdoch's now-defunct News of the World tabloid, lawyers said Friday.

Ian Hurst, who ran agents inside the IRA in Northern Ireland in the 1980s, sued Murdoch's News Group Newspapers after learning from a BBC news report in 2011 that his emails had been hacked.

Hurst's lawyer, Jeremy Reed, said at the High Court in London that News Group acknowledged the agent's emails had been intercepted "routinely and intensively" over several months in 2006.

Reed said when he found out, Hurst "feared for the safety of many of the people with whom he had been in contact," who included people in the witness protection program.

News Group lawyer Anthony Hudson said the company "accepts that such activity happened, accepts that it should never have happened, and has undertaken to the court that it will never happen again."

The company agreed to pay Hurst "substantial" damages and legal costs. The amount of damages was not disclosed.

Murdoch shut down the News of the World in 2011 after the revelation that its employees had hacked the phone voicemails of celebrities,

politicians and others in the public eye. It has paid millions to settle claims from hacking victims.

The phone hacking scandal scuttled a 2011 attempt by Murdoch's company to take full control of British broadcaster Sky, in which it holds a 39 percent stake.

Murdoch's Twenty-First Century Fox is currently trying again to take control of Sky. The British government has referred the deal to the country's competition regulator over fears the deal would concentrate too much power in Murdoch's hands, and concerns about broadcasting standards.

Opponents say the U.K. tabloid wrongdoing and allegations of racial discrimination and sexual harassment at Murdoch's U.S. TV network Fox News show that he does not meet the requirement that U.K. media owners be "fit and proper" people.

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