

NASK - Sense of telecommunications

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Dyżurnet.pl warns against harmful and illegal content online

The presence of vulgar, shocking, inappropriate and even abhorrent content on the Internet has become widespread and the boundaries of acceptance are widening. However we should not underestimate them – says the Dyżurnet.pl team, a point of contact that has been functioning within the framework of NASK since 2005. In 2017 the team recorded nearly 14 thousand reports of potentially illegal and harmful content.

In 2017 specialists from the Dyżurnet.pl team identified 2 459 incidents related to dissemination of child sexual abuse material, 1 339 linked to publishing images of minors in a sexual context – this is the largest group of reports. Other incidents undertaken last year were associated with: pornography available without the required legal warning (49), hard pornography (122), racism (41), cyberbullying (16). In the situation when such content violates the law, the Dyżurnet.pl team informs law enforcement authorities. When materials are legal, but their distribution should be limited (e.g. for adults only), the team intervenes with the website administrator. In 2017 Dyżurnet.pl team reported 2 722 incidents to Interpol and the International Association of Internet Hotlines INHOPE, 952 incidents to website administrators, and 151 to the Police.

NASK experts remind that contact with photographs, films and entries containing violence, incitement to hatred, hard pornography has a negative impact, especially on children and young people.

It is important for young users to be well prepared for potential contact with dangerous or inappropriate content. At a young age personality and character are formed and knowledge about the world is gained, so contact with harmful content can not only cause shock, fear, and emotional difficulties but also reduce sensitivity – says Martyna Różycka, the head of the Dyżurnet.pl team.

As she explains, children watching images not intended for them may feel anxiety, disgust and other negative emotions which is in itself harmful. More importantly, however, prolonged contact with harmful content makes young people adopt inappropriate behavior patterns, for example in the sexual sphere. Young people who

are in regular contact with pornography are more likely to take up erotic correspondence, so-called sexting, sending their intimate photos and videos to another person – says Martyna Różycka. In many cases, it can be a completely unknown person. The survey conducted by NASK among teenagers shows that almost every tenth teenager at least once in his/her life has sent his or her intimate photo to a person known only from the Internet (9,2%). Such behavior is a direct threat to safety. A person who makes his or her erotic image available recklessly exposes himself or herself to blackmail. This dangerous practice is becoming increasingly common in online threat statistics – points out the head of the Dyzurnet.pl team.

The Interpol report, summarizing the cyber threats we faced last year, recalls data concerning the images of sexual nature created by the person displayed on them. 60% of the European institutions fighting against crime, reported an increase in the number of cases in which such materials played an important role. Many of them are duplicated and redistributed to different websites. Interpol warns that if erotic photos or films present minors, they may be searched for and collected by people with pedophile inclinations. It also happens that a victim who is blackmailed and forced to produce further materials or to pay a ransom. Last year the EU countries launched the information campaign “Say No!” on the phenomenon of sextortion, including a film produced by Europol warning against risky online flirt.

Inappropriate patterns may also be associated with violence. “Available online films and images presenting for example animal bullying can stimulate such behavior among young people. Generally speaking, frequent contact with this type of content may result in becoming familiar with violence, reducing empathy and increasing acceptance for violence – warns Martyna Różycka. The same applies to violence against people. It is also worth remembering that according to the Polish Criminal Code publication of content inciting violence or incitement to hatred carries a penalty. “We should consider more carefully what we publish (e. g. when we link to our social networks). Content that may seem to be the slightly subtle joke, can be offensive or discriminatory to someone. Being opposite to violence is exemplary but we should remember to choose appropriate means of expression. We should be also aware that generally accessible content is viewed by children already at preschool age – notes Martyna Różycka.

As she adds, all internet users are responsible for the online content. Therefore, it is worth not only considering your own publications but also reacting to the inappropriate behavior of others, e.g. by reporting a breach of the website rules to an administrator. Children should also receive a special care. “Let’s pay attention which websites our kids visit. React when someone presents them inappropriate content. It is

worth contacting the parents of another kid who for example show peers something we do not accept. Dangerous content can be reported anonymously to the Dyżurnet.pl team – says NASK expert.

The Dyżurnet.pl team is a point of contact that has been functioning within the framework of NASK since 2005. It responds to anonymous reports received from Internet users about the potentially illegal material, such as pornographic content involving a minor. Dyżurnet.pl also carries out awareness-raising and educational activities to increase the level of the online safety of children and young people by, among others, taking various initiatives, including campaigns, conferences, training for professionals and experts as well as workshops for the youngest Internet users. Dyżurnet.pl operates as part of the Polish Safer Internet Centre- the European Commission's program.