



THE UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT of JUSTICE

United States Attorney's Office
District of Oregon

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 22, 2021
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**Federal Employee Who Accessed Child Pornography Aboard Government
Research Vessel Sentenced to Federal Prison**

EUGENE, Ore.—A federal government employee who accessed and possessed child pornography while working aboard a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) scientific research vessel was sentenced to federal prison today.

Johnny Dale Hale, 44, was sentenced to 24 months in prison and five years' supervised release. He was also ordered to pay \$4,000 in restitution to his victims.

According to court documents, in late 2016, Hale, a decorated veteran, was working as a crew member aboard the *Bell M. Shimada*, a NOAA scientific research vessel. On or about November 15, 2016, the vessel was experiencing technical connectivity issues and the information technology team began running diagnostics. While troubleshooting, an electronics technician discovered two new folders on the ship's server containing what he believed to be child pornography.

Diagnostics showed that Hale's unique employee access card was associated with the time and date the folders were initially accessed. Additionally, Hale used two different vessel workstations to access the server at the exact time the folders were created. The vessel's senior security engineer alerted the U.S. Department of Commerce to the discovery.

Special agents and a forensic analyst reviewed the suspect folders and discovered 109 pornographic web links and confirmed the presence of child pornography. Approximately 33 images of child pornography were in one of the suspect folders, with images from at least four series of photographs of previously-identified child pornography victims.

On June 21, 2017, a federal grand jury in Eugene returned an indictment charging Hale with possession of child pornography. On April 23, 2021, he pleaded guilty to that charge.

Acting U.S. Attorney Scott Erik Asphaug of the District of Oregon made the announcement.

This case was investigated by the U.S. Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General, NOAA Office of Law Enforcement, and the FBI. Assistant U.S. Attorney William M. McLaren prosecuted the case.

Anyone who has information about the physical or online exploitation of children are encouraged to call the FBI at (503) 224-4181 or submit a tip online at tips.fbi.gov.

Federal law defines child pornography as any visual depiction of sexually explicit conduct involving a minor. It is important to remember child sexual abuse material depicts actual crimes being committed against children. Not only do these images and videos document victims' exploitation and abuse, but when shared across the internet, child victims suffer re-victimization each time the image of their abuse is viewed. To learn more, please visit the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's website at www.missingkids.org.

This case was brought as part of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative launched in May 2006 by the Department of Justice to combat the growing epidemic of child sexual exploitation and abuse. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit www.justice.gov/psc.

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