

Interstate 911 Prankster Pleads Guilty, Quickly Sentenced

A 19 year-old Washington state man who used his VoIP telephone connection to make prank 911 calls to a southern California sheriff's comm center has pled guilty to five felony counts.

Randal Ellis admitted making the call in 2007 to the Orange County (Calif.) sheriff's comm center that sparked a response of heavily-armed police to a house in Lake Forest. A county judge sentenced him to three years in prison.

Ellis was also ordered to pay \$14,765 in restitution, for the cost of the initial police response and the investigation.

According to court documents, Ellis lives in Mukilteo (Wash.), and was among several persons around the country involved in what's known as "SWATing." The practice involves making false reports of emergencies to public safety comm centers, resulting in a SWAT-level response of law enforcement agencies.

In some cases the addresses given are of people the pranksters want to harass. In other cases, such as this one, the address is simply a random location.

According to court documents, Ellis used his VoIP telephone connection to dial 911 in Orange County. He "spoofed" or falsified the ANI/ALI information so that the call appeared to be originating from an Orange County address.

He described a phony incident that involved armed intruders and threats to kill people. He gave the address of a family in Lake Forest, an inland community along I-5 halfway between San Diego and Los Angeles.

Dispatchers sent deputies, a canine unit and helicopter in response to the prank call. Inside the home, the residents were sleeping.

But after hearing noises outside, the husband armed himself with a kitchen knife and went to the backyard to investigate.

Armed officers confronted him, disarming and handcuffing him. It took several minutes for deputies to realize what had occurred.

It then took six months for investigators to track down Ellis, using computer, telephone and other records.

In Dec. 2007 a Salinas (Calif.) couple suffered a similar prank when someone dialed 911 to report three men armed with AK-47s. The caller claimed to be inside the home, hiding in a closet.

Virtually the entire on-duty force of officers responded to the incident, officials said, but soon discovered there were no suspects. They did determine that 15 year-old at the house had been Internet chatting with someone in Chicago just before the 911 call.

Police investigators said that it's very complicated to investigate such calls, since there are few contact telephone numbers for VoIP providers, and there are several communications providers involved. Most law enforcement

agencies also don't have the expertise or resources to fully investigate these crimes.

In Texas, four persons were arrested and charged with making up to 100 interstate prank 911 calls. The calls were apparently simply a by-product of their real interest of phone chatting, free phone access and other telephone high jinks.

In Nov. 2007 Stuart Rosoff of Cleveland (Ohio) pleaded guilty in a Texas federal courtroom to one count of conspiracy. A second defendant pleaded guilty, while two remain in custody.

A second defendant, Guadalupe Martinez, was sentenced to 30 months in prison, and was ordered to pay nearly \$24,000 in restitution. Rosoff awaits sentencing in jail.

The FBI said there were 40 local and state law enforcement agencies involved in the Texas SWATing incident, indicating the scope of the investigation.