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## Child porn players are in our communities. Why aren't we doing something about it?

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Purell doesn't make enough hand sanitizer to make you feel clean after you learn about some of your neighbors. There's not enough Pepto-Bismol to settle your stomach after you think about what they're up to.

In a nutshell, here it is: Hundreds of people in our area are collecting and trading hard-core child porn.

I got some numbers from the staff of Steve Shannon, who's running for attorney general. When he met with the Editorial Board last week, he talked about his experience prosecuting child abuse cases and his commitment to going after people who use the Internet to prey on children. He told me about software that pinpoints the locations of computers that trade child porn over the Web — and can even show them on maps.

Let's start with the number of computers on which investigators found sadistic child porn:

- **Newport News:** 887
- **Hampton:** 674
- **Williamsburg:** 229
- **Yorktown:** 226
- **Gloucester:** 43
- **Poquoson:** 31
- **Isle of Wight:** 29

They're among 20,000 in [Virginia](#), and that's just the tip of a chilling iceberg. The numbers are a couple of years old, and all the Internet has done since then is grow. They only count computers to which

particularly vile images have been traced, involving very young children (some still babies) who are sexually abused in ways that are sadistic or tortured. And only the ones who were using big file-sharing sites to swap their filth.

Consider the total picture — less-violent images, children who aren't so young but still too young and perverts who aren't logged on to peer-to-peer networks — and you'll reach for the giant-sized Pepto.

Stop and think that these people are walking around in your community, and you'll make your hands raw trying to sanitize away the scum you might have picked up by touching a door they just went through.

And you'll wonder what's being done.

Two statewide task forces, and one on the Peninsula, are concentrating on Internet crimes against children. Virginia has put bits of money and resources into this, but not enough. It would seem to be a much better use of personnel and money than busting people for marijuana.

But that's not how lawmakers see it, so here's the situation, as explained by a [Wyoming](#) official whose agency figured out how to flush these sickos. "We are overwhelmed. We are underfunded. We are drowning in a tidal wave of tragedy. We don't have the resources we need to save these children."

But we could. Because, he says, thanks to the ability to trace specific files to specific computers, "We know how to find these predators. They're just a subpoena away from arrest and prosecution."

We know where they are — around the corner, next to your kid's bus stop. We know what they've got. So why aren't they in jail?

Because it takes law enforcement manpower to track down the address from the Internet provider, get a search warrant, gather the evidence and prosecute the case. And then, what? In [York County](#), two men who recently

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pleaded guilty on child porn possession charges — let's use names, because shame is in order: Jaren Lee Hawkins and Thomas Henry Snively — were sentenced to prison *but the sentence was suspended*.

Well, people of York County, there is this consolation: There are hundreds more right under your nose who are doing the same thing. Maybe your judges will step up.

There's another way to mete out justice — with a well-aimed cleaver. It appeals, but that's because I worked in child protective services, and I've seen what rape does to an infant. Some things you just never forget.

Like this: Behind every image is a real child, victimized in ways so ghastly that you hope there is a Hell, and eternity is a long time indeed. You hope there's an extra hot ring for those who commit and record the abuse — usually the victim's parents or family friends — and those who watch and then, too often, claim victims of their own.

Because the most horrifying piece of all this is that it doesn't end with pathetic men staring at computer screens. This appetite feeds itself. Indulged, it grows. Watching other people do horrific things makes them thinkable — and doable. According to Department of Justice studies, a lot of men who look at pictures of children being sexually abused — maybe a third or more — also do it themselves. They just aren't caught.

I'm sorry about your breakfast. But when we think about what's going on around us, we should all lose our appetites. And our tempers. And then we would do something.

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Sadly our criminal justice system is being focused on marijuana crimes more than anything else in Virginia, with roughly half of all arrests being for marijuana offenses. I have always felt that there were better things to be doing than harassing and intimidating marijuana consumers, and this article further illustrates that point. Marijuana should be regulated and taxed, as this would eliminate the criminal marijuana trade which creates much of the crime in our neighborhoods. Age restrictions would help to keep marijuana out of young peoples hands, the taxes generated would facilitate the rebuilding of our economy, and the law enforcement resources we save could be put to use fighting child abusers. That would be nice, wouldn't it?

*Prohibitionisbad (10/13/2009, 1:05 PM)*

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