

## SEC porn peekers at work confess

By [Jim McElhatton](#)

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U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission workers who made a habit of looking at pornography on their government computers, even as the economy was tanking, offered varying explanations when caught.



"I think it was just arrogance and ignorance on my part," one worker said. "You know, I mean ... I didn't intend to hurt anybody. I didn't intend to hurt the SEC's image or anything like that."

The Washington Times reported in February on the existence of about two dozen such cases, which were detailed in reports to Congress as well as in more than 150 pages of case summaries obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request.

Additional pornography cases surfaced last week in a memo from the SEC's inspector general to Sen. Charles E. Grassley, Iowa Republican. The new memo contained information on a total 33 porn-related investigations over the past five years, most of them during the financial meltdown and 17 involving senior SEC employees earning as much as \$222,000 per year. The memo was first reported by the Associated Press.

"As we said when this story was first reported in the media in February, every instance of inappropriate use of the Internet investigated by the inspector general was detected by the SEC's own surveillance and referred to the inspector general for investigation," SEC spokesman John Nester said Friday.

"Each of the offending employees has been disciplined or is in the process of being disciplined," he said. "Some have already been suspended or dismissed."

Since February, the SEC also has "further increased penalties" for those caught looking at porn at work, Mr. Nester said.

The Times previously reported that some workers caught viewing porn, often for weeks or months at a time, were allowed to stay on the job. One SEC employee who attempted to look up pornography more than 400 times received three-day suspension. Another employee who looked up porn 271 times received a one-day suspension, records show.

"We will not tolerate the transgressions of the very few who bring discredit to their thousands of hard working colleagues," Mr. Nester said.

A review of case reports on the porn-related investigations shows that workers gave varying excuses when confronted by investigators. One worker acknowledged that he didn't have the self-control to stop viewing the pornography, even though he knew he was breaking SEC rules.

"It's something I guess when I felt the need to do it, you know, it wasn't like I intentionally wanted to go out and violate the rule per se," he said.

"So it's kind of like, did I know? Yes. Was ... I thinking about it when I was doing it? The answer is no, you know. It was something, you know, at some point, I ... just kind of did naturally to that extent."

Another worker said he tried to limit his porn viewing during his lunch hour and tried not to let it have an impact on his job performance. He said he stayed late at the office if he needed to finish his work.

Yet another SEC employee, who admitted looking at porn twice a week "for a year or two," said he knew he wasn't allowed to do so but that he always worked extra hours to make sure his work was finished.

"It was a mistake," the employee said, and its all served as "a lesson learned."

Investigators interviewed one employee's supervisor. Calling the employee's work "very good," the supervisor added that the worker's "timeliness still remains a concern," according to the case report.

One worker told investigators that he didn't start out looking at pornography, just Internet sites that contained pictures of people in swimsuits. But from there, he said, he clicked on links that led him to pornographic sites.

The names of the employees and contractors investigated were not released in the documents provided in response to The Times' open-records request. In a letter, officials said the names weren't being released in part because that could subject the employees to "harassment and annoyance in the conduct of their official duties and private lives."

Republicans criticized the SEC over the porn issue last week: "While watching porn all day undoubtedly contributed to the ineffectiveness of the SEC's work force, the administration, Congress and the investing public must demand accountability at all levels of the agency," said Rep. Spencer Bachus of Alabama, the ranking Republican on the House Financial Services Committee.

Memos obtained by The Times show the activities occurred during both the Obama and Bush administrations. Records also show the SEC isn't the only agency with workers who have looked up illicit sites at work. It's an issue that has surfaced in a handful of cases at agencies across government for years.

Last year, The Times reported on several cases at the National Science Foundation. In 2006, the Environmental Protection Agency's inspector general announced the suspensions of two employees for looking at pornography at work. Earlier this year, the inspector general for the Department of Veterans Affairs reported on one employee caught looking at pornography who, at first, denied it.

The employee, who was caught with more than 2,500 pornographic images on his computer, eventually told investigators that "if the images are there and the forensics support that, then they must be there."

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