



Up-skirt voyeur a Jehovah's Witness

SAM BOYER AND MICHELLE DUFF Last updated 05:00 15/06/2013

FURTIVE FILMING: A CCTV image shows the man carrying his briefcase, which housed a hidden camera he used to shoot up the skirts of women and girls.

A Jehovah's Witness filmed up the skirts of hundreds of women and schoolgirls in central Wellington, and when visiting private homes to spread the faith.

Police believe at least 1000 women and girls could have been filmed by the man, 36, who would leave work at lunchtime to spy up their skirts on a handmade device attached to his briefcase.

The former Department of Internal Affairs employee, who has name suppression, has now been kicked out of his church. A member of his congregation at the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kilbirnie confirmed he was not welcome back.

"He has been removed," the church member said. "Everybody has been very saddened by what has taken place. Any act of that nature is a concern."

After the man's arrest in March, police found 1400 recordings, most of which they believe he made around Wellington from February to October last year.

He altered a laptop bag to hide a camera, tailing groups of schoolgirls in Lambton Quay and around Wellington's central business district. He would manoeuvre the camera to film shots up their skirts, sometimes following them into food and clothing stores.

Pupils from five Wellington high schools were identified.

He sometimes targeted mothers with young children, and filmed in the Wellington public library.

He also filmed women from his church as they went door-knocking, or during church meetings.

He installed a camera in the lounge of another person's home and in his own bathroom, where he caught church colleagues and family friends in their underwear or naked.

A Jehovah's Witness elder said the church was shocked and working with victims of a "harrowing" experience. "We have very high standards and it's just blown us away that this has happened."

The bulk of the recordings were made during work hours and lunch breaks, Detective Senior Sergeant John van den Heuvel said.

"He wasn't specific about which schoolgirls he filmed. If they were walking through the CBD, it appears, as far as he was concerned, they were fair game."

The man was eventually caught after a Farmers security guard monitoring CCTV cameras noticed him lurking behind women in the Cuba Mall store.

The guard followed him around the shop floor, and noticed a strange, USB-shaped device protruding from his briefcase, Farmers loss prevention manager Nathan Breed said.

"The male was then positioning the briefcase in a way that the security guard believed would give him observation up women's skirts."

When the security guard approached the man, he denied all accusations and left quickly. The guard phoned police, and followed him down the street until they arrived.

Mr Breed said similar incidents had happened at other Farmers stores nationwide, but never with such an elaborate device. "Usually it's with mobile phones."

When police tried to take the man back to the station, he tried to ditch the camera and denied what he had been doing. Later he co-operated to allow police to identify some of the victims.

He pleaded guilty to six charges in Wellington District Court yesterday, relating to 98 videos sampled from 1400 seized by police.

Each recording featured multiple victims in their underwear, and there were 180 victims in the sample videos.

There was no reason to believe the man had not made all 1400 videos, Mr van den Heuvel said. Police did not think any videos had been traded or distributed.

"What he's pleaded guilty to are the six charges, and the 98 videos were a fair representation of what was filmed. He's pleaded guilty to making those intimate recordings."

Defence lawyer Ian Miller said the man had not admitted making all the videos.

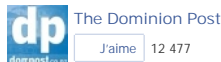
"We are quite firm in that what he has pleaded guilty to is not making 1400 records."

Mr van den Heuvel said that, although the vast majority of his victims would not know they had been filmed, police took the offending seriously.

Wellington schools contacted by The Dominion Post yesterday had no knowledge of the snooping.

Wellington Girls' College principal Julia Davidson said it was horrendous, and questioned why schools had not been notified by police. "I would have thought the police would have let us know - that's just so creepy."

Judge Chris Tuohy remanded the man until next month for sentencing.



- © Fairfax NZ News