



Safer Internet Day – Investing in our future

By: David Thomas

On 9th February 2016 more than 100 countries worldwide, including all 28 countries of the European Union, celebrated Safer Internet Day for the thirteenth year running. Initiated under the European Commission's Safer Internet Programme and now continuing under the Connecting Europe Facility which funds Safer Internet Centres in the member states, the day marks an annual opportunity to engage in making the internet a safer and better place for our children and young people.

Coordinated by European Schoolnet and INHOPE (the International Association of Internet Hotlines), in close partnership with the Insafe network of Safer Internet Centres in Europe, Safer Internet Day has grown tremendously over the years

In Portugal, the activities are being led by the Centro Internet Segura (Safer Internet Centre) and are being coordinated by FCT - Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia (Foundation for Science and Technology).

The law enforcement agencies also play a major part by holding various events. One of the main players, the Commander of GNR Cyber Security Task Force, Lieutenant - Coronel Paulo Santos, spoke to the President of Safe Communities Portugal, David Thomas about their activities marking this day, as well as the development and work of the task force since it was formed in 2014.

To bring their work into the broader context, Lt. Cor. Santos revealed that of the world's population of some 7 billion people, over 3 billion use the internet and there are over 2 billion active social media accounts, figures that are growing considerably. By 2019 it is estimated that the cost of internet fraud will reach a staggering US\$2 trillion. It is essential there that law enforcement invests in combating cybercrime not only through enforcement, but also through education which is what the GNR are doing.

Lt Cor. Santos explained that the focus of their work in marking this occasion has been aimed at junior schools throughout the country, working in conjunction with their partners Microsoft. The program, under the umbrella of the "Safer Internet Project", started on 5th February and this phase will last until the end of the month.

The partnership has involved the in-house training of around 650 GNR members by Microsoft, who are then able to pass on their knowledge to students in many schools throughout the country through Safe Schools Program. The building of the GNR's internal capacity in cyber security knowledge, is an important GNR strategy to help tackle the considerable growth in cybercrime, particularly areas such as cyberbullying and identity theft, which poses a threat to many children.

Lt Cor. Santos explained that engaging young children in the safe use of the internet is not an easy task, so the GNR start by showing the children dog displays, demonstrations by horses as well as the work of the GNR's anti-riot unit. This helps children develop interest and engage with their instructors which fosters closer understanding of the topics. During 2015, some 25,773 children and 1351 parents participated in

these awareness sessions conducted by GNR militars, who have received special training in the area of cyberawareness.

The Safer Internet Project is one of several community programs that the GNR is conducting. It includes a series of coordinated initiatives being developed under the GNR's broad Strategy 2020 on cybersecurity. The first of these involves creating awareness of Cyber prevention directed at citizens, especially youngsters; promoting Cybercrime prevention and strengthening moral and ethical values upon which cyberspace must be built. The second is developing an environment of innovation in the field of Cyberspace and thirdly; promoting collaboration and cooperation between institutions and organizations in the field of Cybersecurity.

Apart from awareness sessions in schools, the Task Force is developing various types of competitions; for example, the preparation of a "Charter of Cybersecurity Principles" and the development of an on-line game based on cybersecurity recommendations implemented by youngsters with the aid of a "scratch framework", under the guidance of teachers and police officers. Outside of the classroom the GNR activities include presentation material and brochures, outdoor awareness display boards, Disney comics and Disney movies and awareness through the GNR Facebook.

During 2016 the GNR will embark on a "School Cyber Challenge" fostering students to be more creative, innovative and critical thinking about Cybersecurity. An aim of this is also get students to interact with elder generations in a challenging way.

Within the broad approach of collaboration aimed at educating children, the Task Force is also developing a "Trust Network" through partnerships between the GNR, businesses, communities, families and friends. Microsoft and Walt Disney are already part of this and Safe Communities Portugal has also become a partner.

Lt Cor. Santos explained the importance of involving businesses as young people today, will become the business leaders of tomorrow, and they will need to have the knowledge to operate safely in an increasingly highly technical business environment.

For businesses themselves there are advantages in becoming a member of the Trust Network, through interaction with other stakeholders; marketing and social visibility; as well as operating in an increasingly innovative way and identifying new opportunities. In return businesses can become involved through awards, providing education and training and the supply of equipment and logistical support.

Anyone interested in becoming part of this initiative and help in the education of young people, can contact Lt Cor. Paula Santos at santos.pjs@gnr.pt or Safe Communities Portugal at info@safecommunitiesportugal.com

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