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# Watching Porn at the Office: 'Extremely Common'

By [Claire Suddath](#) October 09, 2014

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Office workers have long mastered the art of hiding what they're really doing. Online shopping when the boss walks by? Minimize your browser! Perfecting your dating profile when your co-worker comes to chat? Press F4! Yet earlier this year an employee at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency got caught, almost literally, with his pants down. A special agent from the EPA's Office of Inspector General showed up at the senior-level employee's office to find out why he'd stored pornographic images on the network servers. The agent walked in on the guy—you guessed it—watching porn.

When pressed, the employee admitted he'd been watching sexy sites for two to six hours every workday since 2010. That's somewhere from three to eight months of continuous porn watching. The man, who makes about \$120,000 a year, is on administrative leave while the government investigates him. So far, EPA officials have found more than 7,000 porn files on his work computer. At a congressional hearing, it was revealed that he liked to visit a website called Sadism Is Beautiful.

Similar porn scandals have erupted recently at the Department of the Treasury, the National Science Foundation, and the Federal Communications Commission, where an employee said he watched porn for up to eight hours a week because he was bored. In 2010, 33 Securities and Exchange Commission employees were found to have viewed pornography repeatedly instead of doing their work. One senior attorney downloaded so much that he ran out of hard-drive space and just started burning porn to DVDs he kept around his office.

One senior attorney downloaded so much porn he ran out of hard-drive space

"It might surprise you, but this sort of stuff is extremely common—at all kinds of companies," says Nancy Flynn, founder of management training company ePolicy Institute. A 2010 Nielsen ([NLSN](#)) survey found that 29 percent of U.S. employees have looked at porn at least once at work, their sessions averaging 13 minutes at a time. That's nowhere near the EPA dude's consumption, probably because everyone knows that at private companies, if you get caught, you'll likely be fired. Schools are less tolerant, too. In 2006 a Wisconsin biology teacher was fired for looking at thumbnail images of porn for only 67 seconds.

"If there is a sexual harassment or discrimination lawsuit, you can take it to the bank that e-mail and Internet search will be looked at—which means pornography can come into play," says Flynn, who also appears as an expert witness in the occasional sexual harassment lawsuit. "I was a witness in one class-action case against a publicly traded international company where pornography was so pervasive that a

senior executive had hired an assistant whose sole job was to file his porn.” The suit ended in a settlement.

Things don't move as swiftly in the federal government. “There is an administrative process we must follow,” EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy explained during a June congressional hearing, when asked why her porn-crazed worker was still on the payroll. The EPA's employee policy forbids viewing or downloading “sexually explicit” material at work, but like many government agencies, it doesn't guarantee that doing so will get you fired. “Any way that we can make these processes move more quickly, I'm all for it,” McCarthy said.

“Agency after agency has an unbelievably horrendous problem with people looking at inappropriate material on their government computers. Shouldn't there be internal blocks on websites? We have them in my congressional office,” says Representative Mark Meadows (R-N.C.). In response to the EPA scandal, he introduced a bill that would make it illegal for federal employees to tap into pornography while at work, meaning they'd automatically be fired. “Hopefully, the bill won't be necessary. We're trying to get agencies to institute their own zero-tolerance policies,” he says. In the meantime, perhaps the government should consider investing in another controversial workplace practice: the open-plan office.

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