

RI probation officer convicted on federal child-pornography charges

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PROVIDENCE, R.I. – A state probation officer who was assigned to the sex offender unit was convicted in federal court on Monday of receiving and possession of child pornography.

Gerald J. Silva, 59, of Coventry, was convicted on six counts of receiving child pornography and one count of possession of child pornography, according to a news release Tuesday from U.S. Attorney Peter F. Neronha's office.

Investigation by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service and the Toronto Police Service, dubbed Operation Spade, found more than 10,000 customers who had videos shipped to the U.S.

Silva was arrested in September 2012 by U.S. Postal Inspectors after, the U.S. Attorney's office said, an investigation found that Silva was among people who had bought videos depicting child pornography from a Toronto-based company and had the videos shipped to addresses in the U.S.

The prosecution's information presented in court asserted that in May 2011 Toronto Police Service detectives used a search warrant at the premises of Azov Films, which was producing child pornographic DVDs and selling them in more than 90 countries. Detectives obtained Azov Films' business records, which revealed that Silva was a customer, the U.S. Attorney's office said.

The authorities said that evidence showed that between October 2011 and April 2012, Silva bought 75 videos depicting child pornography in 22 separate orders for \$1,589 via the Toronto company's website. The videos were shipped to Silva's home.

According to the government's evidence, Postal Inspectors, Coventry Police, Rhode Island state troopers and officers from the Internet Crimes Against Children task force used a federal search warrant at Silva's residence on Sept. 27, 2012, and seized numerous DVDs depicting child pornography and a laptop computer.

Silva argued to the jury that he ordered and collected the videos as part of a project he had undertaken in his role as a state probation officer.

The jury returned guilty verdicts on all charges after less than one hour of deliberations on Monday afternoon.

Receiving child pornography is punishable by a minimum of 5 years and a maximum of 20 years in federal prison and up to lifetime supervised release; possession of child pornography is

punishable by up to 10 years in federal prison.

Silva is scheduled to be sentenced by U.S. District Court Chief Judge William E. Smith on May 16.