



HALL COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

CRIME PREVENTION UNIT



CRIME PREVENTION BULLETIN

DATE: February 3, 2011
SUBJECT: POSTING PHOTOS ONLINE CAN POSE A PRIVACY RISK

There has been some talk recently about privacy when it comes to posting photos online, so let's take some time to shed some light on the subject. The New York Times ran a good article on it last August, which initially brought it to the forefront. See the full article [HERE](#).

The concern starts when you take a photo with a newer digital camera or cell phone camera. Hopefully without getting too technical (or getting it wrong- I'm by no means a tech-guy), here's what happens: many of these devices have built-in Global Positioning System (GPS) capabilities, which enable a phone's navigation features or offer some very useful photo archiving and mapping options for your pictures. This is done using a feature called "geo-tagging." What this means is that when you take a picture, the device's internal GPS embeds into the digital file the geographical location, in terms of latitudinal & longitudinal coordinates, where the photo is snapped.

And this is where your privacy gets compromised: if an individual has certain software plug-ins for their web browser, he or she can right-click on a photo posted on the web and view the photo's EXIF data, which includes the coordinates mentioned above. They simply get the coordinates from the photo, plug them into a program such as Google Earth, and wa-la: they know exactly where that picture was taken and can even use satellite imagery to get an idea of what your house and neighborhood looks like.



So now, if you just snapped a great little photo of your 5 year-old, standing in the driveway wearing his new baseball uniform before leaving for the ball park, and you want to share it with people online, you may also be sharing your home address with someone who has less-than-pure intentions. The scenarios we could entertain about using this feature for evil-doing are limited only to the imagination.

But there is some good news. Fortunately, most of these devices have the capability to turn off the geo-tagging feature. The procedure varies from one device to another, so consult your owner's manual or the company's tech support resources for instructions. Additionally, an internet search on the subject will reveal as much information as you want to digest.

Like most things, a healthy dose of caution in our daily lives goes a long way. Just as we have to be smart about our surroundings when we're out and about, we have to be smart about our online activity and what it reveals to the world.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact:

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