

# Bad Guys and Dolls

By Reg P. Wydeven  
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My family is steeped in tradition. Every Good Friday we dye Easter eggs with our good friends, the Currys. Each 4<sup>th</sup> of July we watch the Kimberly fireworks in my parents' driveway. On Halloween we go to my folks' house for Butch's pizza after a night of trick-or-treating. For Thanksgiving we join the Currys at Liberty Hall for a delicious meal.

Every year on Christmas Eve we celebrate with my wife's family. On Christmas Day, my mom prepares a scrumptious tenderloin dinner. Of course, the kids wolf it down so they can get to the presents. And every year, my daughter and niece receive the Holiday Barbie doll.

The collector's item features America's favorite doll in a beautiful wintery gown that looks way too warm for Malibu. The doll – in her Holiday version or any one of her myriad of incarnations – is a fixture under millions of Christmas trees around the world. And therein lies the danger.

On November 30, the FBI issued a “cyber crime alert” to law enforcement agencies that this year's new Barbie “Video Girl” doll could be used as a tool by pedophiles to make child pornography.

The FBI regularly distributes such alerts to help investigators improve policing. While these notices are written for law agencies only, someone at the FBI mistakenly sent the Barbie warning to media outlets in Seattle.

According to the alert entitled “Barbie ‘Video Girl’ a Possible Child Pornography Production Method,” the doll has a built-in camera discreetly hidden in Barbie's necklace and a small LCD screen for video display in her back. Retailing for \$49.99, the doll has a camera that can capture 30 minutes of footage, and the video can be downloaded and streamed live to a computer. There is no indication, however, that the footage can be streamed directly to the Internet.

Thankfully, the FBI has no known reported cases of misuse of the doll, which has been on the market since July. The agency, however, fears the potential for abuse exists. The warning cites instances where a person convicted of distributing child pornography had given a Barbie doll to a 6-year-old girl. In addition, the Bureau revealed other investigations where perpetrators used a concealed video camera to record child pornography. While these cameras were not hidden in a doll, the combination of a doll with a hidden camera “in a single device presents a concern for investigators,” according to the alert.

Mattel Inc., the manufacturer of the famous dolls, issued a statement that read, “The FBI is not reporting that anything has happened. Steve Dupre from the FBI Sacramento field office has confirmed there have been no incidents of this doll being used as anything other than its intent. Mattel products are designed with children and their best interests in mind. Many of Mattel's employees are parents themselves and we understand the importance of child safety – it is our number one priority.”

According to Mattel's website, the Barbie Video Girl doll has been nominated for the 2011 Toy of the Year Award.

On the heels of the FBI warning, Phillip Greeves, a 47-year-old Colorado man, was arrested in Florida on obscenity charges for writing and publishing a how-to guide for pedophiles. Bail was set for Greeves at \$15,000 for the third-degree felony charges that could imprison him for up to five years.

As a parent, these sobering stories make me long for the days when the only controversy surrounding Barbie were her unrealistic proportions.

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