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UK Police Crack Down on Illegal Streaming Services

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Millions of UK households risk losing access to Sky TV channels as authorities intensify efforts to combat illegal streaming through devices like “dodgy boxes” and modified Fire TV Sticks. These devices, often available for as little as £50 per year, provide unauthorised access to premium content such as Sky Sports and Sky Cinema, bypassing legitimate subscriptions.

Streaming pirated content carries significant risks beyond legal consequences. Users expose themselves to malicious software that can steal personal data or compromise devices. While prosecution of individual viewers remains unlikely, the focus has shifted to dismantling the criminal networks profiting from these services.

In a recent operation, the Police Intellectual Property Crime Unit (PIPCU) at City of London Police arrested two individuals in their 30s suspected of operating and distributing an illegal streaming service. The raids targeted two residential properties in Oldbury and a data centre in Cheltenham earlier this month. A 30-year-old man, believed to be the mastermind behind the operation, and a 32-year-old woman, accused of distributing copyrighted material and handling criminal proceeds, were taken into custody.

PIPCU's investigation revealed that the pair reaped substantial profits from their illicit activities. As part of the crackdown, authorities seized content servers, effectively halting the transmission of pirated streams to subscribers. This disruption is believed to have significantly impacted several pirate services across the UK.

In a recent interview with City of London Police, Detective Constable Daryl Fryatt from PIPCU stated, "This activity should serve as a reminder that PIPCU will pursue criminals who seek to profit from illegal streaming and disrupt their operations. This is a crime that diverts funds away from the creative and entertainment industries, money that supports thousands of technical and support staff. At the same time, it exposes end users to the risks of data theft, fraud, and malware."

Matt Hibbert, Group Director of Anti-Piracy at Sky, echoed this sentiment, saying, “We are extremely grateful to the Police Intellectual Property Crime Unit for taking this action against a significant pirate operation. We will continue to work alongside the police and industry partners to tackle piracy and disrupt the criminal networks behind it. This action helps to keep consumers safe from the serious risks that piracy can pose to devices and personal property.”

The government’s failure to prioritise robust measures against digital piracy has left industries vulnerable, with critics arguing that the current Labour administration’s focus on other issues has allowed such criminal enterprises to flourish.

This latest action by PIPCU underscores the need for stronger enforcement to protect both consumers and the creative sector from the far-reaching consequences of illegal streaming.