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## ***Gov't warns E-mail could choke to death on spam***

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The diagnosis on Internet spam is dire and could threaten the future of E-mail, a top government official said yesterday.

The spread of billions of unwanted Web messages known as spam - hawking everything from sex aids to low-rate mortgages - "is more serious than even we thought," Federal Trade Commission Chairman Timothy Muris told the Daily News after a three-day spam summit.

"It's a serious problem, much more than a nuisance, and it's becoming worse," he said. It's "certainly hindering the utility of E-mail."

Even the White House is concerned. "They are aware of the seriousness of the problem," Muris said.

From heavy-duty corporate networks to personal accounts, the messages cascade into in-boxes around the clock, an intrusive nuisance that diminishes workplace productivity and burdens computer servers, the commission was told.

"The solution, to the extent that there is one, will require greater education, technology and enforcement," Muris said.

This week, a man known as the Buffalo Spammer was ordered to pay \$16 million in damages to Internet service provider EarthLink for sending 857 million junk E-mails.

While the Bush administration generally has charted a go-slow approach on regulatory matters, the comments by Muris, a Bush appointee, signal a more aggressive approach to junk E-mail.

"We have brought cases against spammers, and we are trying to see what more we can do directly," Muris said.

The FTC has not taken a position on proposed congressional legislation intended to combat the problem. But Muris voiced concern about a proposal by Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) to duplicate a national do-not-call registry with a do-not-spam list.

If junk E-mailers snared the list, "They could just spam the people on it," Muris said. A Schumer aide responded that the FTC would control the list and the addresses could be encrypted.