SAN FRANCISCO (Reuters) - Police may search computer hard drives for child pornography if their owners subscribe to Web sites selling the images, a U.S. appeals court ruled on Thursday.

There is a "fair probability" customers of child pornography Web sites receive or download the illegal images, opening the door for police searches, according to the ruling by the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.

The ruling affirmed a lower court's decision supporting an affidavit by the Federal Bureau of Investigation for its probe of Lolitagurls.com Web site and subscriber Micah Gourde.

Gourde had sought to suppress more than 100 images of child pornography seized from his home computer, arguing an FBI affidavit did not establish probable cause he had violated child pornography laws to justify a search of his computers.

The ruling affirmed a lower court's decision supporting an affidavit by the Federal Bureau of Investigation for its probe of Lolitagurls.com Web site and subscriber Micah Gourde.

"It neither strains logic nor defies common sense to conclude, based on the totality of these circumstances, that someone who paid for access for two months to a Web site that actually purveyed child pornography probably had viewed or downloaded such images onto his computer," McKeown added.

Gourde had sought to suppress more than 100 images of child pornography seized from his home computer, arguing an FBI affidavit did not establish probable cause he had violated child pornography laws to justify a search of his computers.
Gourde's attorney, Assistant Federal Public Defender Colin Fieman, said he would discuss with Gourde whether to appeal it to the U.S. Supreme Court.

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