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Columbine families sue computer game makers



Roses to commemorate the 13 people killed at Columbine

By BBC News Online technology correspondent Mark Ward

Relatives of people killed in the Columbine massacre are seeking damages from computer game makers, claiming their products helped bring about the killings.

The group filing the lawsuit say investigations into the tragedy revealed the influence violent computer games had on the two teenagers who carried out the shootings.

A total of 25 companies are named in the lawsuit and the group is seeking \$5 billion in damages.

But the legal claim looks unlikely to succeed because similar suits filed in the wake of previous school shootings have been thrown out of the courts.

Legal challenge

The lawsuit against the makers of computer games was filed earlier this month on behalf of Dave Sanders, the teacher killed in the Columbine shooting, and other victims.

On 20 April 1999 teenagers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold went on an armed rampage at Columbine High School in Colorado, killing 12 students and a teacher, before turning their weapons on themselves.

The lawsuit alleges that many of the computer games produced by the 25 companies it names created the conditions that made the massacre possible.

Companies named include: Sony America, AOL/TimeWarner, ID Software, Atari, Sega of America, Virgin Interactive Media, Activision, Polygram Film Entertainment Distribution, New Line Cinema, GT Interactive Software and Nintendo.

The text of the lawsuit alleges: "Absent the combination of extremely violent video games and these boys' incredibly deep involvement, use of and addiction to these games and the boys' basic personalities, these murders and this massacre would not have occurred."

John DeCamp, the lawyer acting on behalf of the families, said the legal case is trying to change the marketing and distribution of violent video games that turn children into "monster killers".

Investigations into the Columbine shooting showed one of the killers with a sawn-off shotgun in his lap that he called 'Arlene' - allegedly after a character in the Doom computer game.

In Doom, players take on the role of a lone space marine stalking corridors and shooting creatures with a variety of weapons.

The families of those killed at Columbine have already won a \$2.5m settlement from the parents of Klebold and Harris, and those who supplied the pair with guns.

But the legal challenge looks like it will fail because a similar lawsuit filed in the wake of a 1997 school shooting was dismissed when it came to court in April last year.

A federal judge said he threw out the case saying computer games are not subject to product liability laws.