

President Signs Tough New Anti-Piracy Law

With stricter rules and increased penalties, the new law may raise howls of protest, or put more pressure on piracy networks.

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President Bush on Monday signed into law the Prioritizing Resources and Organization for Intellectual Property Act (PRO-IP Act), which provides stiffer penalties for breaching intellectual property. Formerly known as the Enforcement of Intellectual Property Rights Act, the PRO-IP Act was introduced by Senators Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and Arlen Specter (R-Penn.) in the Senate in July.

In addition to stiffer penalties, the PRO-IP Act establishes the Cabinet-level position of intellectual property enforcement coordinator (IP czar, for the rest of us) and gives the Department of Justice (DoJ) more muscle to coordinate federal and state efforts against counterfeiting and piracy.

The stipulations of the Act are excessive, Art Brodsky, spokesperson at Washington, D.C.-based public interest advocacy organization Public Knowledge told *InternetNews.com*. "Big media already has enough tools and penalties on the books and we don't need any more," he said.

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"It's not like cases aren't being brought under existing laws. Look at the Jammie Thomas case in Minnesota where the woman was hit with a \$220,000 fine," he added.

Thomas, a single mother of two in Duluth, Minn., was sued by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) and fined \$220,000 for illegally downloading songs from the Internet. She was using the Kazaa peer-to-peer (P2P) software package.

A group of university professors later told the trial judge, federal Judge Michael Davis, he erred when he instructed jurors at the trial that having an open folder filled with copyrighted music amounts to infringement. Judge Davis agreed, and last month declared a mistrial and ordered a new jury be appointed to hear the case.

The PRO-IP Act was passed in the House of Representatives last month. It has strong support from the RIAA and the Software Information Industry Association (SIIA).