

Highlights of [GAO-04-503](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The emergence of peer-to-peer file-sharing applications that allow networks to share computer files among millions of users has changed the way copyrighted materials, including digital music, videos, software, and images can be distributed and has led to a dramatic increase in the incidence of copyright infringement (piracy) of these digital materials. These applications enable direct communication between users, allowing users to access each other's files and share digital music, videos, and software. According to a coalition of intellectual property owners in the entertainment industry, an increasing number of students are using the fast Internet connections offered by college and university networks to infringe copyrights by illegally downloading and sharing massive volumes of copyrighted materials on peer-to-peer networks.

GAO was asked to describe (1) the views of major universities on the extent of problems experienced with student use of file-sharing applications as well as the actions that the universities are taking to deal with them and (2) the actions that federal enforcement agencies have taken to address the issue of copyright infringement on peer-to-peer networks as well as agency views on any legislative barriers to dealing with the problems.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-503.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Linda Koontz at (202) 512-6240 or koontzlj@gao.gov.

FILE SHARING

Selected Universities Report Taking Action to Reduce Copyright Infringement

What GAO Found

The college and university officials we interviewed are aware of the use of file-sharing applications on their networks, almost all of them have experienced some problems and increased costs as a result of the use of these applications, and they are taking steps to reduce the use of these applications on their networks. All of the officials interviewed indicated that their colleges or universities routinely monitor their networks, and most of them indicated that the institutions also actively monitor their networks specifically for the use of these file-sharing applications. When infringing use is discovered, all of the representatives stated that enforcement actions are taken against the individuals responsible. These actions included issuing a warning to the user or users, banning them from the network for a period of time, and managing the bandwidth available for a group of users.

Federal law enforcement officials have been taking action to investigate and prosecute organizations involved in significant copyright infringement. These groups use a wide range of Internet technologies to illegally distribute copyrighted materials over the Internet. Federal law enforcement officials did not identify any specific legislative barriers to investigation and prosecution of illegal file sharing on peer-to-peer networks. According to the Department of Justice officials, the department's recently created Intellectual Property Task Force will examine how the department handles intellectual property issues and recommend legislative changes, if needed.

U.S. Customs Agent with Hard Drives Seized during Operation Buccaneer



Source: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.