

WHAT IS WRONG WITH ILLEGAL FILE SHARING?

There are many reasons to avoid illegal file sharing. Not only do pirated materials deprive legitimate content creators and producers of revenue, but these works often contain significant differences from the originals and may be inferior in quality. Uploading or downloading copyrighted works without the permission of the copyright holder may be a violation of copyright laws and can expose you to fines, penalties, lawsuits, and even imprisonment.

You should also be aware that criminals use pirated content—ringtones, software, screensavers, music, movies, and streams of live events—to distribute malware and commit identity theft. Whether you use a file-sharing program or download or stream content from pirate websites, you are accepting files from people you do not know. This high-risk activity exposes your computer to malicious programs, including Trojan horses, worms, and viruses designed to install keystroke loggers that capture your usernames and passwords or give control of your computer to criminals.

Organizations such as the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) and the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) have also been known to upload modified copies of their products to file-sharing networks in order to identify and sue users who illegally share their copyrighted materials.

For more information about computer security, visit it-security.usc.edu.

EDUCATE YOURSELF ABOUT COPYRIGHT

Copyright infringement laws are applicable to all copyrighted works, including movies, television programs, music, software, books, poems, photographs, anime, cartoons, and video games. U.S. federal law treats copyright infringement—including copyright infringement that occurs using file-sharing software—as a serious offense that carries serious consequences.

USC policy prohibits any infringement of intellectual property rights by any member of the USC community. Additionally, USC's computing policies prohibit operating servers in USC residential housing.

USC account holders are responsible for all activity that transpires through the devices that are registered to them. It is important to understand how file-sharing software functions, be vigilant about default settings, and use file-sharing software only for legitimate purposes.

Visit cio.usc.edu/policies to learn more about USC's computing policies. For more information about copyright infringement and fair-use exceptions, as well as alternatives to illegal file-sharing, visit cio.usc.edu/copyright/resources.

WHAT YOU
NEED TO
KNOW
FILE
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ABOUT
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WHAT IS COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT?

Generally, copyright infringement occurs whenever someone makes a copy of any copyrighted work, including songs, movies, videos, software, cartoons, photographs, stories, or books, without permission (i.e., a license) from the copyright owner and without falling within the specific exceptions provided for under the copyright laws. (For basic information about fair use and other exceptions, see cio.usc.edu/copyright/resources.)

Civil penalties for copyright infringement may include actual damages and profits, or statutory damages, ranging from \$750 to \$30,000 per work that is infringed. The court can also award reasonable attorney's fees and costs and substantially increase the damages in the case of a willful copyright infringement.

Criminal penalties can include fines and imprisonment of up to five years.

ILLEGAL FILE SHARING ON CAMPUS

Every year, students across the U.S. receive copyright infringement notices from organizations such as the RIAA and the MPAA because they have illegally exchanged files using file-sharing software, also known as peer-to-peer (P2P) software.

Some of these students have paid thousands of dollars to settle lawsuits related to copyright infringement. In certain cases, the cost of settlement ranged from approximately \$3,000 to \$5,000 or more for the initial offense—sometimes no more than the downloading or uploading of a single song. Some students were unaware that their file-sharing program was making the content that they had legitimately purchased available to the P2P network.

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HOW DOES P2P WORK?

Peer-to-peer (P2P) applications such as BitTorrent allow you to search for, download, and upload files through a desktop program instead of a web browser. P2P is an evolving technology, and there are significant differences in the ways that particular programs operate.

In a P2P network, your computer may act as a server, providing content to other members. When you install a file-sharing program, you agree to the terms of use of the network and designate a default sharing folder on your computer for use by the program. Because P2P networks rely on their members to supply files to other members, P2P programs contain features designed to allow the network to access and distribute files stored on your computer. If you do not pay attention to default settings, you may inadvertently allow any member of the P2P network to access files on your computer.

Additionally, when you request a file through a P2P network, the file may be downloaded from any computer in the network. The file is usually downloaded in parts, or packets, from multiple computers in different locations, and the packets are then reassembled on your computer. You have limited ability to control the source of the files you receive on a P2P network.