

Jail For Illegal Software Downloads

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A jail term of up to six months and a fine of up to \$20,000 for downloading copyrighted files is making Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) students reconsider their actions when it comes to “ripping off” music, movies and software.

The Copyright Act was amended from 1 January, to come down hard on people who obtain illegal file downloads.

“Previously, only the company can be fined. So for the first time, under the amended Act, [the] copyright infringer can face jail terms, just like thieves,” said Mrs Caroline Loh, Deputy Librarian of the Library, in an e-mail interview.

Mrs Loh, who declined to reveal her age, added that the amendment was necessary “to keep pace with new Internet technologies”.

For example, programs such as BitTorrent and KaZaA allow web users to download and send files— including music and movie files — among themselves.

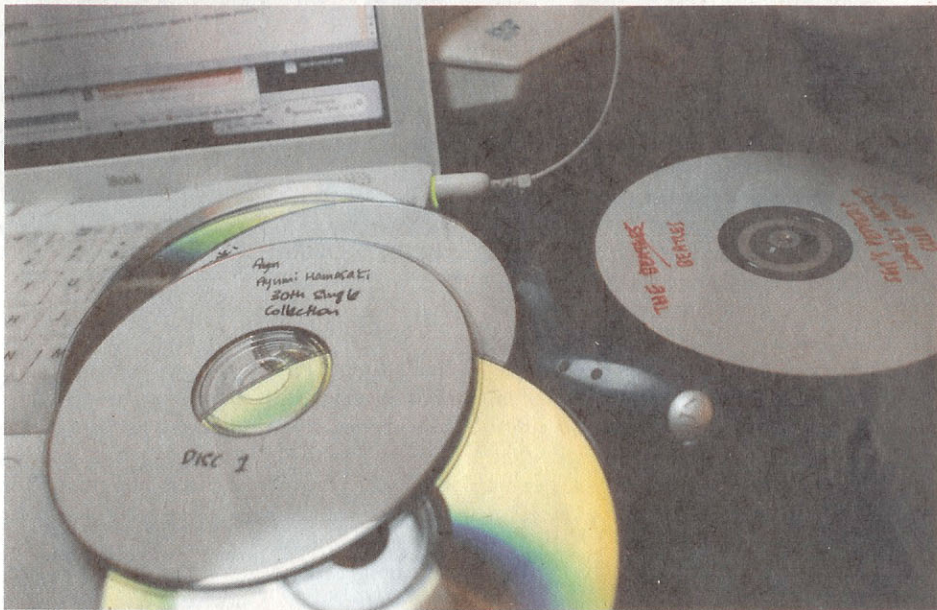
“Illegal downloading of files is a habit which students have to break away from,” said Mrs Loh. “Just as students will not think of taking another person’s belongings... as this would be considered theft... they should not resort to illegal downloading of songs or movies.

“Library will help to create this awareness among students and staff through announcements in various publicity channels.”

Mrs Loh added that students may borrow music CDs and movies from the Library.

However, for those who borrow such materials to make unauthorised copies, Mrs Loh said, “There are Copyright stickers [on the CDs] warning users against copyright infringements. The onus is on the user to comply with copyright. Otherwise, they will be opening themselves up for civil action.”

The Computer Centre (CC) denied monitoring the NP network, or even planning to do so in future, to prevent illegal downloads or file transfers.



AN END TO PIRACY ON CAMPUS: Students have to use original software or face prosecution. [Picture: Leonard Goh]

It added, through an e-mail, that NP’s policies have always “adhered strictly to copyright law”.

CC implied that students should have no reason to download illegal software for projects and school work when they said, “NP has helped students through the provision of core software applications bundled together with the notebooks purchased from campus.”

This, however, had not stopped students from continuing to download software and applications on the sly in the past.

Most of the several students *Tribune* spoke to admitted to having done so but are now thinking twice given the new legislation. They spoke to *Tribune* on condition of anonymity.

Peter (not his real name), 17, a first-year Internetworking & Communications (INC) student, said, “I think I will get caught... I would rather play safe.”

Final-year Business Information Technology (BIT) student Alvin (not his real name), 20, said, “I can feel the pressure [of getting caught], even though I am [just] one of the millions

downloading... I still need to be aware.”

The law is making itself felt and eliminating sources, according to Jane (not her real name), 19, a final-year Business Studies (BS) student. She added that some Internet Relay Chat (IRC) channels that she frequented to download MP3s have now closed down.

Mrs Loh said that the Library was “reviewing the resources that we currently make available to staff and students on NPNet, to ensure that there are no copyright infringements as a result of the changes to the Act”.

Even Nigel Chu, 18, a first-year Engineering Informatics (EI) student, who claimed to only use legitimate CDs and software, can understand the temptation to run afoul of the law.

He said, “People who download [copyrighted files]... [may not] have money to buy original CDs.” Or they may prefer to download content because it was “much faster” to obtain them.

“You don’t have to walk all the way just to buy a particular CD,” said Nigel. “With a click, you can just download a song.”