

DPE Commends Agreements to Curb Digital Theft, Notes Government Leadership

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In the last week, two important sets of Internet stakeholders reached voluntary agreements with holders of intellectual property (IP) rights that will help to curb digital theft, copyright infringement, and product counterfeiting. The Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO (DPE) commends the agreements, notes the crucial role of government leadership, and underscores the urgency of passing the PROTECT IP Act (Preventing Real Online Threats to Economic Creativity and Theft of Intellectual Property Act, S. 968).

On July 5, 2011, White House Intellectual Property Enforcement Coordinator (IPEC) Victoria A. Espinel released a voluntary agreement between Internet payment system operators (PSOs) and IP rights-holders. The agreement sets out a standard set of best practices for PSOs as they interact with the rights-holders to address copyright infringement and the sale of counterfeit products on the Internet. The PSOs included American Express, Discover, MasterCard, PayPal, and Visa. IPEC Espinel and her staff played a major role in bringing the parties to the table and facilitating development of the agreement.

On July 7, Internet service providers (ISPs) and makers and distributors of movies, television shows, and recorded music announced a voluntary agreement creating both a system of Copyright Alerts to ISP subscribers and a Center for Copyright Information to support the system and educate consumers about copyright infringement. Participating ISPs included AT&T companies, Verizon companies, Comcast Cable, CSC Holdings, and Time Warner Cable. The parties thanked Andrew Cuomo for his work as New York Attorney General “to bring the parties together and successfully launch the negotiations.”

DPE President Paul E. Almeida commented, “As members of the arts, entertainment, and media unions affiliated with DPE know all too well, digital theft hurts U.S. workers, jobs, incomes, and benefits. By joining these voluntary agreements, the payment system operators and Internet system providers demonstrate responsible corporate citizenship. Their leadership honors the spirit as well as the letter of the law and will benefit the U.S. economy.”

Almeida continued, “As commendable as these voluntary agreements are, they represent the fruit of committed federal and state government leadership. This demonstration of responsible corporate citizenship contrasts dramatically with the bad behavior of rogue website operators, many outside the United States, who profit from the illegal distribution of stolen IP and counterfeit goods at the expense of the U.S. economy, U.S. companies, and U.S. workers. To fight the plague of rogue websites in these tough economic times, I call on Congress to pass the PROTECT IP Act as rapidly as possible.”

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The Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO (DPE), is a coalition of 21 national and international unions that represent professional and technical people. Together the unions affiliated with DPE represent over four million people in more than 300 occupations. Among them are professionals in the arts, entertainment, and media; engineering, science, and information technology; education and information resources; health care; and public administration. DPE is the largest association of professional and technical workers in the United States. For more information, see www.dpeaflcio.org.