



Illegal File Sharing and the UK Law - what you should do.

Since the introduction of the Digital Economy Bill (DEB) early this year, the music industry's been handing out fines here, there and everywhere to punish illegal Internet downloaders. But what if you receive one and don't think you did anything wrong - what should you do about it?

The DEB was introduced to reduce online copyright theft and who can disagree - sharing copyrighted files is wrong and damages the economy. But should an already dominant and powerful industry be allowed to issue hefty fines without producing any solid evidence?

In August 2010, one London law firm issued 2,000 fines because of illegal file sharing which infringed The Ministry of Sound's copyright. This has caused an uproar from those who received them. Many claim they didn't download the offending files but were offering public Wi-Fi to their customers. So, who's responsible for this and what should they do about it?

What if you receive a fine?

If it's your home Internet connection and you're sure you didn't share anything, you need to immediately change your Wi-Fi password (or turn it on)! It's likely that someone nearby has been using your connection. Whether you pay the fine is your decision (and your fight) - although the DEB does mean you're responsible for whatever happens on your connection.

If you're a business owner and you've been offering Wi-Fi to your customers, it may have been one of them. You therefore need to produce evidence that it wasn't you and work out who it was. You should have been told exactly when the file was shared and you should have a record of who was online at that time. If you use a commercial Wi-Fi provider, talk to them immediately - they should know what to do. If you've been doing it yourself and didn't keep any records, you may just have to pay the fine.

Public Wi-Fi providers should keep a list of users as part of the new act. They often provide a content filtering service that blocks anything illegal in the first place.

In the future we need some balance. Ofcom are proposing that the music companies pay the ISPs for this privilege based on the predicted amount of compensation claims they make against broadband subscribers. This still doesn't force the evidential standards to be outlined. Ofcom has left this to the Music Industry and ISPs to decide on these between themselves.

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