

Final Assessment Report 07-05, March 31, 2007, "Report on Peer-to-Peer File Sharing"

GPO Policy 825.29A, *Internet and E-Mail Policy, Section 7b (12)*, prohibits the "unauthorized acquisition, using, reproducing, transmitting, or distributing of any controlled information. Such information includes computer software and data that contains privacy information, or is copyrighted or trademarked, or material with other intellectual property rights (beyond fair use)." Peer-to-Peer (P2P) file sharing has been a way of sharing files since mid-1999, and since that time its use has grown dramatically. Although it can be used for legitimate purposes, such as software collaboration, P2P file sharing is often used for the inappropriate or illegal exchange of files. P2P file sharing has even been used to post sensitive Federal Government documents to the Internet. P2P software is easy to use and acquire. To potentially acquire illegally distributed copyrighted as well as inappropriate or offensive material, users need only install no-cost P2P client software and enter a search string. Illegal file exchange through P2P networks has become so common that organizations such as the Recording Industry Association of America have pursued legal action against users of P2P software.

An OIG assessment of P2P file sharing found that GPO's Internet and e-mail policies establish the foundation for monitoring and prohibiting P2P activities. However, the OIG identified a P2P file distribution protocol being used within the GPO network domain. Use of P2P file-sharing software can increase GPO's IT risks in several ways. Some P2P client software has known vulnerabilities that can easily be exploited remotely and thus compromise the system on which the software is installed. Improper configuration of P2P software makes it possible for a user to inadvertently share all files on a computer and network drives with other P2P users. Additionally, illegally distributing copyrighted material to or from GPO computers could embarrass the Agency or potentially involve it in litigation with copyright holders.

We recommend in our report, which is considered sensitive, that GPO management further strengthen controls over P2P. Management concurred with our recommendations and proposed responsive corrective actions.