

Congress should require P2P disclosures

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Editor's Corner:

Everyday there's news about another lapse, where company guidelines were insufficient and unable to keep data safe. One of the biggest culprits is peer-to-peer or P2P sharing—when files are made available to other users over the Internet. It opens the back door to data breaches, and it's been the cause of many problems.











Peer-to-peer technology can be used to play games, make online telephone calls, and share music, video and documents.

When P2P file-sharing software is not configured properly, files not intended for sharing can be available to anyone on the P2P network. Some people use P2P to download copyrighted material such as films and music without the consent of the owners.

We report this week on legislation moving through Congress that would require software developers to inform users when their files are made available to other users over the Internet. The bill, which passed the House and is now pending in the Senate, would require file-sharing software to display a pop-up box alerting Internet users when they encounter such programs, and empower the Federal Trade Commission to obtain civil penalties against distributors that do not comply.

The bill would also let consumers and employers block or disable file-sharing programs, and give the FTC authority to seek civil penalties for violations. The problem is growing and not going away. The FTC

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recently disclosed that 100 American corporations had exposed personal information belonging to hundreds of thousands of people through the use of peer-to-peer file sharing networks.

We're not sure the legislation is a panacea or that notifying users that their files may be available to other users would prompt concern.

Nevertheless, the idea could provide one extra safeguard, could be a great benefit to some consumers, and should be approved by

Congress. - Judi