

Vkontakte Copyright Violator Faces 6-Year Term

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The first criminal case for copyright violation has been opened against a user of the social network VKontakte, the Interior Ministry's press service has reported. The accused faces up to six years in prison.

The Interior Ministry's Division K has opened a criminal case against a 26-year-old Muscovite who posted 18 recordings by "a well-known Russian musical group" on his VKontakte page.

The case, opened in accordance with Article 146 of the Criminal Code, is for "infringement of copyrights and related rights," as alleged by the Nikitin record company, which owns exclusive rights to the recordings. A ministry source said unofficially that the violator "has not been arrested and will most likely not be sent to jail."

Criminal cases have been previously opened against VKontakte users for circulation of

extremist and pornographic materials, but this is the first case for a copyright violation, VKontakte spokesman Vladislav Tsyplukhin said. The user's name has not been disclosed.

Interior Ministry experts determined that the recordings posted by the user were downloaded more than 200,000 times, causing an estimated \$3,600 in damage to Nikitin. This "illicit activity" took on epic proportions, and the copyright holder suffered "enormous losses," an official statement said.

The ministry plans to step up its fight against illegally distributed content on the Internet and continue to make lawbreakers criminally liable.

In response to the growing number of lawsuits by copyright holders, Internet companies are insisting that users take personal responsibility. In October, heads of Google Russia, Yandex, Mail.ru, Rambler and VKontakte wrote an open letter requesting that they be released from liability for content uploaded by users.

The companies proposed that the copyright holders themselves verify the legality of audio and video content posted on web sites and, if any pirated material is discovered, notify that site's administrator, who would then take action.

It is obvious that a user posting illegal content is liable, but that fact is not enough to curtail the amount of piracy on the Internet, said Yulia Mitrovich, acting director of the video service Zoomby.

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