The convenience and excitement of the Internet is undeniable.

One popular activity is Peer-to-Peer (P2P) file sharing, which enables users to share music, movies, video games, images and other files with just a click of a mouse.

While file sharing is easy and convenient, there also are risks.

Potential risks of file sharing:

- Breaking copyright laws.
- Turning over private information to predators and identity thieves.
- Exposing yourself or your children to adult content and child pornography.
- Harming your computer with viruses.

By reading and speaking with your family, you can better understand P2P file sharing and make an informed decision on its use.

- Read the entire EULA before downloading.
- Update your anti-virus software regularly.
- Make sure family/parent filter is turned on.
- If the program runs automatically each time you turn on your computer, see if you can change this under “Options” or “Settings.”
- Make sure the P2P file sharing program stops running once the window is closed. Again, check your “Options” or “Settings.”
- Read the Frequently Asked Questions before downloading.
- Check the default settings under the “Options” and “Settings” menus.
- Speak with your family about file sharing.
- Never download, copy or send a copy of a song, movie or other copyrighted file unless you have permission from the holder of the copyright or have paid for that file.
- Report any exposure to child pornography to the Office of the Attorney General at cybercrime@oag.state.va.us or to your local police department.

Contact Information:

Office of the Attorney General of Virginia
Antitrust and Consumer Litigation Section
202 North Ninth Street
Richmond, VA 23219
www.vaag.com
cybercrime@oag.state.va.us.
(804) 786-2071

Federal Trade Commission
Consumer Response Center
CRC-240
Washington, D.C. 20580
www.ftc.gov

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON

Peer to Peer (P2P) File Sharing

Q. What is Peer-to-Peer File Sharing?

A. A system that allows a computer to scan files stored on other computers and download copies of them. File sharing is enabled by special software which can be purchased or downloaded.

Q. What is an End User License Agreement (EULA)?

A. The EULA is a contract for use of software. When you download P2P file sharing software you must click "I agree" and accept the terms of the software provider's user agreement. You should read the entire EULA before agreeing to it. It contains important information and warnings about your legal responsibilities as well as some of the dangers of using file sharing software.

Q. I checked "I agree" to a EULA. What does that mean?

A. Once you click "I agree" you are saying that you have read the terms and conditions and you agree to follow them. By doing so, you accept certain new responsibilities, which may include:

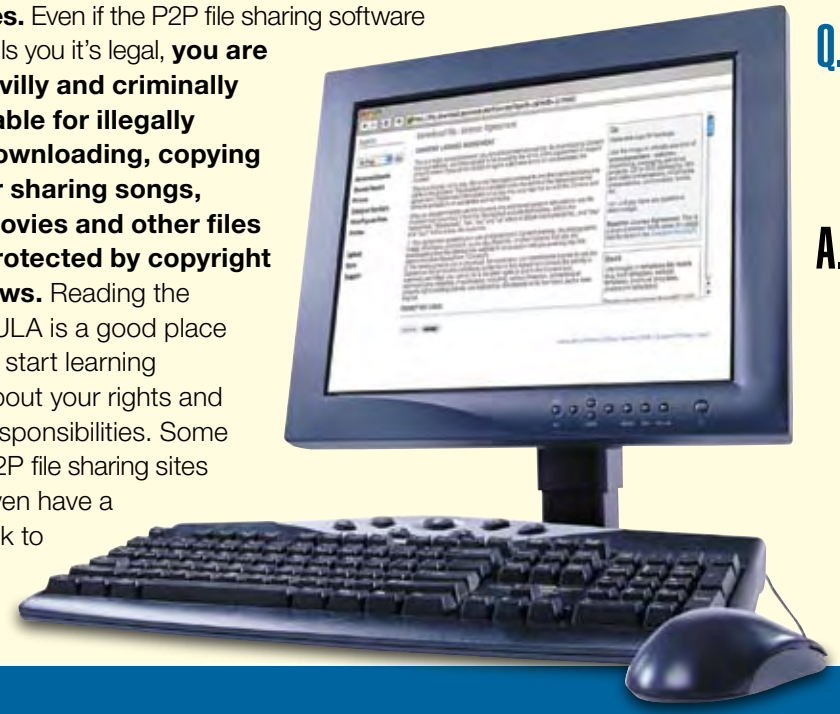
- Responsibility for anything that may happen to your computer, like downloading a virus, as a result of using the software.
- Agreement to obey all federal and state laws when you download or share files with others (whether you are aware of the laws or not).
- Agreement not to infringe the copyrights or intellectual property rights of others.
- Agreement not to use the software to distribute child pornography or other offensive material.
- Responsibility for civil and criminal penalties for any violations of state or federal law.

Q. Can filters protect me from exposure to unwanted or offensive files?

A. They can help, but they are not perfect. **Make sure the P2P file sharing software you use provides a filter and that it is activated.** Activation of the filter may require an affirmative action on your part. The filter may be off by default, so you may have to change the default settings under the "Options" menu. But be careful – filters generally cannot block all unwanted content from appearing as a result of your file searches. For example, filters may not be able to block mislabeled files that contain unwanted or offensive materials.

Q. Can I be held responsible for copyright infringement by participating in file sharing?

A. **Yes.** Even if the P2P file sharing software tells you it's legal, **you are civilly and criminally liable for illegally downloading, copying or sharing songs, movies and other files protected by copyright laws.** Reading the EULA is a good place to start learning about your rights and responsibilities. Some P2P file sharing sites even have a link to the EULA so you can print and read it before deciding whether to download the software.



Q. Can my computer contract a virus by participating in Peer-to-Peer file sharing?

A. **Yes.** The software you are installing may have an anti-virus feature, but it may not always be effective. Many files available for downloading may contain codes that can harm your computer such as Trojan horses, worms and viruses. They can slow your computer down or even cause it to crash completely. They can be disguised as games or images with fun and exciting titles. To avoid these dangers:

- When in doubt… **DON'T OPEN!** Never open a suspicious file.
- Make sure files you open come from a reputable source or someone you know.
- Make sure your anti-virus software stays up to date and that it checks all files you download from the internet.

Q. Will I be exposed to identity theft and other privacy issues by entering a file sharing network?

A. You can be. The files the software makes available to others in the network may contain personal information, like your social security number or credit card numbers. Make sure you know what files you are making available for sharing and that these files do not contain personal information.