WASHINGTON (Reuters) - People who attempt to copy music or movies without permission could face jail time under legislation proposed by the U.S. Justice Department on Thursday.

The bill, outlined by U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales at an anti-piracy summit, would widen intellectual-property protections to cover those who try but fail to make illicit copies of music, movies, software or other copyrighted material.

It would also enable investigators to seize assets purchased with profits from the sale of illicit copies, as well as property such as blank CDs that might be used for future copying.

Those found guilty of a copyright violation could be forced to pay restitution to the owner of the material in question, and repeat offenders would face stiffer sentences.

"This legislation is a reflection of the sustained commitment on the part of the Bush Administration, including the Department of Justice, to ensure that we are doing everything we can to combat this problem," Gonzales said in a press release.

A recording-industry trade group praised the bill, but a public-interest group, Public Knowledge, said the Justice Department should consider measures that would protect consumers' fair-use rights as well.

The bill has not yet been introduced in Congress.

Congress in recent years has strengthened copyright laws to help media companies battling the widespread copying of their works, and law enforcers have increasingly targeted groups that release movies on the Internet hours after they appear in theaters.

The U.S. Supreme Court also struck a blow for the entertainment industry in June when it ruled 9-0 that Internet file-trading companies can be held liable if they induce
users to break copyright laws.

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