Bush Signs Camcorder-Piracy Bill Into Law

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - People who secretly videotape movies when they are shown in theaters could go to prison for up to three years under a measure signed into law by President Bush on Wednesday.

The law also toughens penalties for hackers and industry insiders who distribute music, movies or other copyrighted works before their official release dates.

Bush signed the bill in a closed-door ceremony and released no public statement.

Copies of hit movies frequently show up on the Internet while they're still in theaters, allowing skinflint fans to see new releases without buying a ticket.

Pirates sneak camcorders into movie theaters to tape films directly off the screen, while some industry insiders leak copies to tech-savvy hackers before they're officially released.

The U.S. Customs Department has estimated that these distribution groups are responsible for 95 percent of all pirated movies available online.

Those found guilty could face up to three years in prison, as well as lawsuits from copyright holders.

The law also shields "family-friendly" services like ClearPlay that strip violent or sexually explicit scenes from movies.

That provision is less popular with Hollywood, which says such services violate their copyrighted works by altering them without permission.

Nevertheless, a trade group representing large movie studios hailed the bill's passage.

"Video piracy is not a victimless crime," said Dan Glickman, president of the Motion Picture Association of America.
Both houses of Congress approved slightly different versions of the measure last year, but could not reconcile their differences before the session ended.

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