What You Should Know About Illegal Software

(NAPSA)—Research shows that one out of every four pieces of business software used in the United States is illegal, but the fact that it is commonplace does not mean it isn't criminal.

Software piracy is not a victimless crime, says SPA Anti-piracy, a division of the Software & Information Industry Association (SIIA), which is active in anti-piracy efforts. Experts estimate that the software industry loses billions of dollars every year due to software piracy.

Organizations that use illegal software run a high risk of being caught by SIIA and having to pay substantially for violating copyright law. In addition, companies using illegal software lose technical support, upgrades and fixes. The illegal software may also contain viruses, which could harm other content on a computer.

Software piracy hurts all companies, even the ones playing by the rules. That's because software companies sometimes have to raise prices to make up for their lost revenue, resulting in higher software prices for all companies.

Keith Kupferschmid, head of SPA Anti-piracy, says that use of pirated software is easily preventable. Here are some signs to look for:

• Is software installed on many PCs from a single disk? If so, the business may not have enough licenses and is installing the software illegally.

• Is there a lack of documentation for installed software? If so, it may not exist.

• Are employees told not to call the help desk for certain software?

Organizations that use illegal software run a high risk of being caught and having to pay a substantial fine.

If so, they may not be authorized users.

• Often, some employees make it an open secret that software is being installed illegally.

To avoid lawsuits and other legal problems, leading-edge companies increasingly are taking steps to make sure they aren't caught with illegal software. Corporate piracy is often made known to outsiders by disgruntled ex-employees.

"This is a major issue at all companies," Kupferschmid says. "While most companies are interested in making sure their employees use legal software, some turn a blind eye toward piracy. That is unwise."

SIIA has several programs dedicated to combating piracy, including its Certified Software Manager (CSM) seminars. It also makes information available at www.spa.org/piracy. Cases of corporate, retail and Internet piracy can be reported on the Internet at www.siia.net/piracy/report/default.asp or by calling the Anti-Piracy Hotline: (800) 388-7478.