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FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ANNOUNCES OPERATION D-ELITE, CRACKDOWN ON P2P PIRACY NETWORK

First Criminal Enforcement Against BitTorrent Network Users

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Acting Assistant Attorney General John C. Richter of the Criminal Division, Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for Immigration and Customs Enforcement Michael J. Garcia, and Assistant Director Louis M. Reigel of the FBI's Cyber Division today announced the first criminal enforcement action targeting individuals committing copyright infringement on peer-to-peer (P2P) networks using cutting edge file-sharing technology known as BitTorrent.

This morning, agents of the FBI and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) executed 10 search warrants across the United States against leading members of a technologically sophisticated P2P network known as Elite Torrents. Employing technology known as BitTorrent, the Elite Torrents network attracted more than 133,000 members and, in the last four months, allegedly facilitated the illegal distribution of more than 17,800 titles – including movies and software – which were downloaded 2.1 million times.

In addition to executing 10 warrants, federal agents also took control of the main server that coordinated all file-sharing activity on the Elite Torrents network. Anyone attempting to log on to Elitetorrents.org today will receive the following message: "This Site Has been Permanently Shut Down by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement."

"Our goal is to shut down as much of this illegal operation as quickly as possible to stem the serious financial damage to the victims of this high-tech piracy – the people who labor to produce these copyrighted products," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Richter. "Today's crackdown sends a clear and unmistakable message to anyone involved in the online theft of copyrighted works that they cannot hide behind new technology."

"Internet pirates cost U.S. industry hundreds of billions of dollars in lost revenue every year from the illegal sale of copyrighted goods and new online file-sharing technologies make their job even easier," said Assistant Secretary Garcia. "Through today's landmark enforcement actions, ICE and the FBI have shut down a group of online criminals who were using legitimate technology to create one-stop shopping for the illegal sharing of movies, games, software and music."

"The theft of copyrighted material is far from a victimless crime," said Assistant Director Reigel of the FBI. "When thieves steal this data, they are taking jobs away from hard workers in industry, which adversely impacts the U.S. economy. The FBI remains committed to working

with our partners in law enforcement at all levels and private industry to identify and take action against those responsible.”

Building on the success of Operation Gridlock, a similar takedown announced by federal law enforcement last August that has already led to the felony convictions of three P2P copyright thieves, Operation D-Elite targeted the administrators and “first providers” or suppliers of copyrighted content to the Elite Torrents network. By utilizing BitTorrent, the newest generation of P2P technology, Elite Torrents members could download even the largest files – such as those associated with movies and software – far faster than was possible using more traditional P2P technology.

The content selection available on the Elite Torrents network was virtually unlimited and often included illegal copies of copyrighted works before they were available in retail stores or movie theatres. For example, the final entry in the Star Wars series, “Episode III: Revenge of the Sith,” was available for downloading on the network more than six hours before it was first shown in theatres. In the next 24 hours, it was downloaded more than 10,000 times.

Operation D-Elite is being conducted jointly by ICE and the FBI as part of the Computer And Technology Crime High Tech Response Team (CATCH), a San Diego task force of specially trained prosecutors and law enforcement officers who focus on high-tech crime. Federal and state member agencies of CATCH include the ICE, the FBI, the Department of Justice, the San Diego District Attorney’s Office, San Diego Police Department, the San Diego Sheriff’s Department, and San Diego County Probation.

Operation D-Elite was coordinated and will be prosecuted by the Justice Department’s Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section, with the assistance and support of Computer Hacking and Intellectual Property (CHIP) coordinators in San Diego and U.S. Attorneys’ Offices in Arizona, Illinois, Kansas, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia and Wisconsin.

The Motion Picture Association of America provided valuable assistance to the investigation.

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