

The Latest in Evangelistic Trends: International Arms Trafficking!

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Reprinted from *Christian Computing Magazine*

Some time ago an article caught my eye about folks going to jail because they took computers outside of the U.S. The problem was that, because of computer processor capabilities and the built-in cryptographic capabilities of common off-the-shelf software, doing so violated Export Administration Regulations. The article went on to describe the maximum fines and penalties associated with the export of these items: \$1,000,000 plus 10 years in jail for each criminal violation, or \$500,000 plus a 3-year export ban for each civil violation.

A few days later a colleague who works for an international ministry told me he had just sent software updates to their overseas field offices. Click—the light went on. I told him about the article I had just read which applied to the software technology he just sent overseas. We were both shocked as we discussed the impact these regulations could have on similar international ministries and computer donations.

Historical Context

The original regulations, called International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR), about such exports were issued decades ago to keep advanced intelligence technology built in the U.S. from those who could use it to harm us and/ or our interests. Since that time, the oversight of computer technology exports has been transferred to the Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security.

Yet these laws are broken every day by those who are unaware of their application to today's computers and software. While some argue that they're out-dated, there are many who have been fined and many who are sitting in jail today for their willful— even though unintentional— violation.

Export Limits

The Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) has that most countries cannot receive certain computers based on their technology. The list includes Afghanistan, Canada, France, Russia, and many others that one wouldn't expect to see on the list.

(Visit <http://beta-www.bis.doc.gov/index.php/policy-guidance/lists-of-parties-of-concern/entity-list> to see the list.)

It's All About Encryption & Communication

The concern centers around hardware processing and software encryption/ decryption capabilities and communication capabilities.

This sounds like it could keep many from helping missionaries and ministries from doing their work around the world. Don't give up! There's an easy way to know if what you want to do is legal. Keep reading.

Contact Your Missionaries

Many churches and ministries have given computers to overseas missionaries and pastors unaware that doing so may have violated U.S. Export Administration Regulations!

Ask those missionaries and pastors whom you have blessed with computers and software to send you a list of exactly what hardware and software they have. Do the same for any overseas offices your ministry has. Have them include the version/model numbers and serial numbers.

There May Be An Easy Fix!

According to officials at the Bureau of Industry and Security, answers may be just a phone call away. All you need to do is call 202/482-4811 between 9am and 5pm EST to determine if the software and/or hardware is a concern. They may be able to give you the good news that what you're wanting to do requires no license!

Sounds easy, doesn't it? It is.

In The Future...

Call the Bureau of Industry and Security to obtain the necessary license to export before sending that encryption-capable software and/or hardware overseas. According to BIS officials, they would rather see compliance sought, than to have to investigate and enforce it after the fact.

This law may seem bothersome. Perhaps it is, but it is the law, and in light of 9/11, it may make a major difference in our safety. As Christians we should model righteousness to this dark world around us. Whether there are potential fines or not, if the law doesn't violate a scriptural principle, we should obey it.

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