

German court orders wireless passwords for all

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(AP) -- Germany's top criminal court ruled Wednesday that Internet users need to secure their private wireless connections by password to prevent unauthorized people from using their Web access to illegally download data.

Internet users can be fined up to euro100 (\$126) if a third party takes advantage of their unprotected WLAN connection to illegally download music or other files, the Karlsruhe-based court said in its verdict.

"Private users are obligated to check whether their wireless connection is adequately secured to the danger of unauthorized third parties abusing it to commit copyright violation," the court said.

But the court stopped short of holding the users responsible for the illegal content the third party downloads themselves.

The court also limited its decision, ruling that users could not be expected to constantly update their wireless connection's security - they are only required to protect their Internet access by setting up a password when they first install it.

The national consumer protection agency said the verdict was balanced.

Spokeswoman Carola Elbrecht told the German news agency DAPD it made sense that users should install protection for their wireless connection and that at the same time it was fair of the court not to expect

constant technical updates by private users.

The ruling came after a musician, who the court did not identify, sued an Internet user whose wireless connection was used to illegally download a song which was subsequently offered on an online file sharing network.

But the user could prove that he was on vacation while the song was downloaded via his wireless connection. Still, the court ruled he was responsible to a degree for failing to protect his connection from abuse by third parties.

About 26 million homes in Germany have wireless Internet access, according to Bitkom, the German Association for Information Technology, Telecommunications and New Media.

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