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RIAA marks one year of college threat-letter drive

Posted by [Anne Broache](#) | [Post a comment](#)

The Recording Industry of America is nearing the one-year anniversary of dispatching "prelitigation" letters to alleged pirates on college campuses nationwide.

And it's showing no signs of slowing down, celebrating--not surprisingly--by firing off a new wave of 401 legal threats this week to 12 major universities from coast to coast. This time around, it accuses individuals of stealing music through peer-to-peer services such as Ares, BitTorrent, Gnutella, Limewire, and Morpheus, the RIAA said Thursday.

Per the usual, the [documents](#) offer students the opportunity to settle out of court with the RIAA at a "reduced fee" if they respond within 20 days.

Since the campaign's launch last February, the RIAA says it has sent more than 5,400 such letters to students at more than 150 schools and reached settlements with more than 2,300 of the accused. It has filed formal lawsuits against 2,465 letter recipients because they either "disregarded" the out-of-court settlement offers or were not forwarded information from their universities in time to accept that offer.

Critics charge that the letters are just a scare tactic, and the RIAA has admitting to goofing on identifying copyright infringers in the past. But the music industry still views its prelawsuit campaign as an important deterrent. Without such action, "an emerging legal marketplace...would have struggled to gain traction," spokeswoman Cara Duckworth said in a press release.

"Unfortunately, too many students continue to ignore the law and get music from illegal services like Limewire that do not invest a penny in nurturing music or compensating the artists, labels and the thousands of behind the scenes workers bringing music to the public," Duckworth added.

The RIAA's latest threats come barely a month after the [Motion Picture Association of America admitted it had erroneously concluded illegal movie downloads by college students accounted for](#) 44 percent of the industry's domestic piracy losses. The MPAA now says students account for 15 percent of domestic losses, or about \$195 million. The RIAA, for its part, has been citing statistics from the market research firm NPD that found college students made 1.3 billion illegal music downloads in 2006.

The industry has also persuaded Congress to intervene, with the House of Representatives recently [approving new antipiracy obligations for universities](#) as part of a broader higher-education authorization bill.