



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on July 1, 2009

China Delays Censorship Software Rule

This is not the end of the MIIT's efforts to get the censorship software installed on as many computers as possible. A spokesman for the ministry said that it will "continue to provide a free download of the software and equip school and Internet bar computers with it after July 1." The MIIT will also "keep on soliciting opinions to perfect the pre-installation plan." While it is certainly true that computer manufacturers faced difficulties with the July 1 deadline, the fact that some PC makers jumped to comply with the order means that there may be more to this postponement than meets the eye.



Rebecca MacKinnon, assistant professor at the University of Hong Kong's Journalism and Media Studies Centre, has posted [a blog entry](#) showing what she describes as a Sony disclaimer notice for the Green Dam software. This indicates that Sony was aiming to comply with the censorship edict. A June 30 AP story stated that "large PC makers such as Toshiba Corp. and Taiwan's Acer Inc. said they were ready to provide Green Dam on disks." Hewlett-Packard and Dell declined to discuss their plans for compliance. Apple computers and Linux systems would presumably have been unaffected since Green Dam Youth Escort is a Windows-only program.

While the list of computer makers willing to comply may not be exhaustive, the fact that Sony, Toshiba, and Acer planned to go along with the censorship demands does hint that China could have stood by its July 1 deadline. There are other factors at play here. As AP pointed out, "representatives from U.S.-based technology groups, including the Information Technology Industry Council and the Software & Information Industry Association, were in Beijing trying to stop Green Dam." The Information Technology Industry Council represents companies including Dell, Hewlett-Packard, and Apple.

CNET News [reported on June 24](#) that U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk and Commerce Secretary Gary Locke had sent a letter to the Chinese Ministry of Commerce expressing concern that the Green Dam software violates World Trade Organization rules. Kirk said in a statement that "protecting children from inappropriate content is a legitimate objective, but this is an inappropriate means and is likely to have a broader scope. Mandating technically flawed Green Dam software and denying manufacturers and consumers freedom to select filtering software is an unnecessary and unjustified means to achieve that objective, and poses a serious barrier to trade."

An ["Analysis of the Green Dam Censorware System"](#) published by researchers at the University of Michigan's Computer Science and Engineering Division found a host of problems that support Kirk's assertions. The bugs were found "with less than 12 hours of testing," and "they may be only the tip of the iceberg." The researchers concluded that "Green Dam contains very serious security vulnerabilities" which "seem to reflect systemic flaws in the code." They believe that "if Green Dam is deployed in its current form, it will significantly weaken China's computer security."

Then there are the indications that Green Dam Youth Escort may be as flawed legally as it is



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technically. It appears to use open-source computer vision software developed by Intel called OpenCV. Green Dam is using OpenCV as a way to detect nudity in online images. OpenCV requires programs using it to include license text, but early versions of Green Dam did not include the text. Potentially more serious is the evidence that Green Dam stole code from Solid Oak Software's filtering program called CYBERsitter. ZDNet's most recent article about this [appeared on June 30](#) and presented further evidence that Solid Oak's code was ripped off. Solid Oak has a [list of copyright infringements](#) at their website.

In judging whether or not Solid Oak Software has a legitimate claim, it is at least worthy of noting that a [June 29 InformationWeek article](#) reports the following: "Solid Oak Software, the Santa Barbara, Calif.-based maker of Web filtering software called CYBERsitter, on Friday contacted the FBI to investigate a cyber attack on the company that appears to have come from China." Ah, so unlike [Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon](#), sometimes the Chinese tiger leaps to attack and reveals a dragon that is no longer hidden.

Such is the totalitarian regime in Beijing; they will likely crouch patiently with their latent demand for Green Dam Youth Escort until the public furor dies down. Then Green Dam will one day rear its ugly head again with a generous deadline that no PC maker eager for profits will be able to refuse.



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