

Pirated CDs seller forced to apologise

He will pay \$100,000 and faces criminal action

By Brendan Pereira

THE International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) has taken legal action against a seller of fake compact discs, one of a new breed of pirates who have changed tactics to avoid detection.

Instead of displaying the pirated CDs at his stall, he showed customers a catalogue of titles, and had runners pick up the CDs from a nearby shop.

The IFPI, a non-profit organisation which represents producers and distributors of recordings in more than 75 countries, said this sales method had become common among vendors at street stalls, night markets and even among some shop owners.

One such vendor sold CDs at the New Bugis Street night market. The IFPI started legal action against him in September, obtaining an interim injunction to prevent him from dealing in pirated CDs.

But despite the court order, he continued to sell the CDs. Together with officers from the police intellectual property rights warrant unit, the IFPI raided his store and seized nearly 500 pirated CDs of newly released Chinese and English hit songs.

He agreed to pay \$100,000 in damages to the IFPI to settle the civil suit. As part of the settlement, he agreed to publish in The Straits Times and Lianhe Wanbao tomorrow an apology to the IFPI and its members for the copyright violation, undertaking also to stop committing such acts.

A spokesman for the organisation said this was the first time it had asked a copyright pirate to make a public apology — a measure favoured by copyright owners of video tapes and laser discs. Criminal action, which could send him to jail, is pending.

IN THE COURTS



Ms Leong May Seey, IFPI's regional counsel for Asia, said: "We will not hesitate to take legal action, both civil and criminal, against music pirates. CD piracy has been on the increase in Singapore, especially at street stalls and night markets."

Last year, the group conducted 41 raids and seized 1,390 CDs and 91 tapes, compared with 38 raids in 1994 and the seizure of 551 pirated CDs and 41 cassette tapes.

It is understood that vendors sell the CDs for between \$12 and \$18, which is \$8 cheaper than the original version.

But nabbing them is not an easy task. Many try to avoid detection by moving their stalls to different locations from time to time.

Mr Vincent Tan, manager of Commercial Private Investigation and Security, an investigation agency which specialises in copyright matters, said: "It is like playing hide-and-seek. They also have lookouts to alert them if anyone looking like an enforcement officer is in the area."

To counter the lookouts, Mr Tan said he had to use one set of men for surveillance and another for raids.

Also, now that the fake CDs are not displayed, investigators have to follow the runners to find out where the pirated discs are stored.