

Illegal activities online

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The article warns about many common online behaviors that can create legal, privacy, or security risks. It lists eleven of these practices:

- Using unofficial streaming services
- Using torrent services
- Using copyrighted images
- Sharing passwords, addresses, or photos of others
- Bullying and trolling
- Recording a VoIP call without consent
- Faking your identity online
- Using other people's internet networks
- Collecting information about people younger than 13
- Extracting audio from YouTube
- Illegal searches on the internet

Among the listed activities, some of them entail serious legal offences and may guarantee convictions and prison times.

Top 5 serious activities

The most important listed items are:

- **Sharing passwords, addresses, or photos of others**

This practice, usually called Doxxing, is serious because it discloses personal and confidential information making it increasingly possible for the targeted individual to become victim of identity theft or physical harm. Although there are currently no explicit federal laws that protect victims of doxing, many state laws, including in Virginia, punish it with misdemeanor, and felony charges.

- **Collecting information about people younger than 13**

This practice is very serious and has been regulated by the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) since April 21, 2000. Other regulations protect older children when it comes to their health (HIPPA) and education data (FERPA). Violating the COPPA can result in civil penalties of up to \$53,088 per violation.

- **Recording a VoIP call without consent**

The illegality of this practice depends on the context, and the technique used to acquire those recordings. In general, someone without a warrant is not allowed to tap into a telephone line. When it comes to conversations, many states, including Virginia(*Va. Code Ann. § 19.2-62*) allow "One party Consent", meaning that if someone is part of a conversation, there is no need to get the consent of the other parties involved to record the interaction.

- **Faking your identity online**

This one depends on the context. Users make fake identities to access online resources to achieve anonymity. However, using someone else's identity may constitute theft of identity. Identity theft carries severe state and federal penalties, including mandatory prison time, heavy fines, and mandatory restitution to victims. Under federal law, basic identity fraud can yield up to 15 years in prison, while Aggravated Identity Theft under (18 U.S.C. § 1028A) mandates an additional 2-year prison sentence that runs consecutively to other penalties.

- **Extracting audio from YouTube**

Without the author's consent, extracting audio from YouTube videos violates both YouTube's EULA and copyright laws. Exception is made for content that are derivative work, public domain or used in the context of "Fair Use".

The other activities such as recording consent, photography, and Wi-Fi access depend on the specific jurisdiction and circumstances. They are not in themselves infractions, but merely tools that may be used to do either good or bad in the cyberspace. When it comes to online searches, certain keywords may trigger federal and local agencies threat detection systems, so using them with that in mind is always advised. The article's main point is that "common" does not automatically mean legal or without consequences. It advises readers to use legitimate services, respect consent, and obey copyright laws to avoid run ins with the law.

References

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