

So it shall be entered: A computer-ethics code

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Snooping in someone else's computer files would be considered a sin under a proposed set of "Ten Commandments of Computer Ethics."

The commandments were drawn up by the six-month-old Computer Ethics Institute, whose members include ethicists, theologians, people in business, educators, technologists and public-policy experts.

The proposal is being circulated in the industry for comment.

More than 100 million computers are in use around the world, half of them in the United States. As computers have proliferated, so have computer crimes, including unauthorized perusal of databases, theft of data, and the cre-

ation of "viruses" that can interfere with computer operations or destroy data.

"We are clearly in need of ethical guidelines," said institute chairman Ramon C. Barquin, a former IBM executive who runs a consulting firm.

"Whenever you have a new technology, you find there are some unforeseen and undesirable consequences," he said. "No one thought of traffic jams or drunken drivers when the automobile was first developed."

The proposed commandments:

- I. *Thou shalt not use a computer to harm other people.*
- II. *Thou shalt not interfere with other people's computer work.*
- III. *Thou shalt not snoop around in other people's computer*

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Group proposes computer-ethics code

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files.

IV. *Thou shalt not use a computer to steal.*

V. *Thou shalt not use a computer to bear false witness.*

VI. *Thou shalt not copy or use proprietary software for which thou hast not paid.*

VII. *Thou shalt not use other people's computer resources without authorization or proper compensation.*

VIII. *Thou shalt not appropriate other people's intellectual output.*

IX. *Thou shalt think about the social consequences of the program*

thou art writing or the system thou art designing.

X. *Thou shalt always use a computer in ways that ensure consideration and respect for thy fellow humans.*

Ethical questions have already arisen. Computer Ethics Institute secretary Warren Calkins, a senior staff member at the Brookings Institution who trained in theology, cited the attempted use last year of the Prodigy network to disseminate an anti-Semitic message.

Prodigy officials had to decide whether the First Amendment guarantee of free speech applied. Ultimate-

ly, the company said it would not permit messages "grossly repugnant to community standards" to appear on its electronic bulletin boards.

In another instance, an attempt was made to use a computer bulletin board to swap information on child pornography.

Barquin said computers used by courts to gather information in child-custody cases could be programmed to decide which parent gets custody. But that would be an improper use of the machine, he said, as would using computers to choose the recipients of transplanted medical organs.

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