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UK citizens may soon need licenses to photograph some stuff they already own

Copyright strikes again, with photographers and publishers hit particularly hard.

by Glyn Moody (UK) - Dec 12, 2015 8:00am PST

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saiko

Changes to UK copyright law will soon mean that you may need to take out a licence to photograph classic designer objects even if you own them. That's the result of the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013, which extends the copyright of artistic objects like designer chairs from 25 years after they were first marketed to 70 years after the creator's death. In most cases, that will be well over a hundred years after the object was designed. During that period, taking a photo of the item will often require a licence from the copyright owner regardless of who owns the particular object in question.

The UK government is holding [a consultation into when this change should enter into force](#): after a six-month, three-year, or five-year transitional period. An article in *The Bookseller* puts [the starting](#)

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date as **October 2016** without citing a source. In any case, the change is definitely coming, and it'll likely be quite soon.

Similar to the recent announcement that it is once again **illegal to make private copies of music you own**, it is unlikely the public will pay much attention to this latest example of copyright being completely out of touch with how people actually use digital technology. But for professionals, the consequences will be serious and not so easily ignored.

Photographers, for example, will need to worry about whether any of the objects in a picture they are taking is covered by copyright, in which case it may be necessary to obtain a licence to include them in the photo. And judging by its comments in the document accompanying the consultation on this issue, the UK government is not very sympathetic to the plight of photographers. "The Government considers that photographers and image libraries already bear costs for time and administration when assessing whether they need to obtain clearance when photographing other artistic works such as sculptures or paintings." In other words, *tough*.

Another group likely to be hit by this major copyright extension—publishers of books with pictures of design objects—is also being told to like it or lump it. The Digital Reader spoke with Natalie Kontarsky, associate director for legal and business affairs at the well-known art publisher Thames & Hudson, and she did not mix messages. "The government has actually said 'you are collateral damage' in a very sanguine, offhand way. The dark end of the spectrum would be to take books out of circulation and have to pulp. Obviously no one wants to look at that."

Unfortunately, the alternative isn't much better. "Licensing images retrospectively is likely to be a very expensive prospect—in terms of actual licence fees to rightsholders, working out who actually owns the rights and the cost of getting picture researchers involved and people like me on the legal side," Kontarsky told the Reader.

It seems like **the UK government really wants to reduce red tape** *except* when it comes to copyright. Then, it's happy to increase the burden on thousands of companies and professionals—and to see millions of UK citizens become law-breakers without really knowing or caring. So the next time you get the family picture album out, beware. Those old snaps might just show you're now breaking the law.

This post originated on [Ars Technica UK](#)

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Glyn Moody / Glyn Moody is Contributing Policy Editor at Ars Technica. He has been writing about the Internet, free software, copyright, patents and digital rights for over 20 years.

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