

Don't Let DRM Sink its Hooks into the Web; Stop the Encrypted Media Extension (EME) Proposal

We write to implore the World Wide Web Consortium and its member organizations to reject the [Encrypted Media Extensions](#) (EME) proposal. As prominent organizations defending Internet and computing freedom, we join the more than ten thousand Web users who have already signed [Defective by Design's petition](#) against EME. This disastrous proposal would change HTML, the underlying language of the Web, to make it accommodate and encourage Digital Restrictions Management (DRM).

The W3C's work is crucial to the continued integrity and interoperability of the global network. We recognize the need for the W3C to respond to the changing landscape of the Web and to reconcile the interests of multiple parties. But ratifying EME would be a failure; it would harm interoperability, enshrine nonfree software in W3C standards and perpetuate oppressive business models. It would fly in the face of the principles that the W3C cites as key to its mission and it would cause an array of serious problems for the billions of people that use the Web.

EME would damage the Web's interoperability by encouraging the continued proliferation of a wide variety of differing plugins for playing DRM-encumbered media. Since each plugin option could have unique hardware and software constraints, this would move the Web away from universal compatibility and toward a more fractured state, perhaps even towards the outdated paradigm of deliberate incompatibility. This would run counter to the W3C's stated mission; "global interoperability" is an explicit commitment of the [Open Stand](#) standards guidelines to which W3C is a signatory.

DRM requires the obfuscation of source code, making it incompatible with free "as in freedom" software. Because of this, browser plugins designed to play media under the EME specification would all be proprietary, and widespread adoption of this plugin system would pressure more and more Web users to sacrifice their computing freedom to view media. Enshrining nonfree software in HTML itself would comparatively diminish the values of freedom, self-actualization and decentralization on the Web. DRM itself is a paradigm that perpetuates damaging hierarchies by restricting the freedom of many for the benefit of a powerful and privileged few. By weaving Digital Restrictions Management into the fabric of the Web, EME would strengthen and endorse business models that are oppressive to users.

The W3C's official vision statement also "recognizes that trust is a social phenomenon, but technology design can foster trust and confidence" and asserts that the W3C's mission includes "building trust on a global scale." We challenge the W3C explain how that trust will be built by a specification designed to help companies run secret code on users' computers to restrict what they do on the Web. It would seem, conversely, that the only trust being built here is between media companies calling for DRM and their powerful allies plugging EME in the W3C.

A common defense of EME is that it does not actually incorporate DRM itself into HTML, but rather creates hooks for DRM plugins. This argument is a dishonest attempt to ignore the fact that EME is clearly designed specifically to accommodate DRM. Claiming that EME adds no DRM to the Web is like saying (in the words of the Electronic Frontier Foundation's Seth Schoen) "We're not vampires, but we're going to invite them into your house."

As the Web becomes an ever more vital medium for culture, commerce and communication, the base of stakeholders in the W3C's decisions is widening and diversifying. But ratifying EME would represent the narrow interests of a group of entrenched software firms with strong ties to the entertainment industry. We need look no further than 2011's SOPA/PIPA debate to see that these special interests do not have the freedom and empowerment of Web users in mind. Though it is not the W3C's role to prevent these companies from implementing DRM on the Web, endorsing EME would constitute an abdication of responsibility to the core goals of the W3C and the Web-using public. We call on the W3C to reject EME and any other provision for DRM in World Wide Web standards.

Sincerely,
Signing organizations