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Microsoft sued over technology in Windows, Explorer

By Laura Raun / Bloomberg News

REDMOND, Wash. -- Microsoft Corp., the world's largest software company, was sued by an Internet-technology firm for alleged infringement of its patent in popular Microsoft products like Windows 98 and Internet Explorer.

Closely held Eolas Technologies Inc. accused Microsoft of illegally using its browser system that allows the embedding of small programs, such as those that enable electronic commerce, in Web pages to make them interactive. The suit filed yesterday in U.S. District Court in Chicago seeks unspecified damages and a halt to the sale of products involved, including Microsoft's Windows 98 operating system and Internet Explorer browser.

The suit is part of a recent spate of litigation over patent rights to technology that makes the global computer network easier to use. Because the Internet is still a relatively new medium, the rights of inventors and the corporations that market Internet-based products still are being established.

"There's a conflict between the way this industry has done things and the whole concept of protecting inventors' rights," said Michael Doyle, founder and chief executive of Eolas and lead inventor on the patent. "This is an industry where it's easy for someone to see an idea and go back to his computer and copy it."

Microsoft is reviewing the suit and has no immediate comment, said company spokesman Tom Pilla.

Chicago-based Eolas, founded in 1994, received its patent in November.

Microsoft, America Online Inc. and Yahoo Inc., among others, were sued last week by Denver-based CIVIX-DDI, which claims the companies infringed on its patented technology for mapping systems that can be used to find places via the Internet.

For Microsoft, the fresh legal disputes come as it battles the Department of Justice and 19 states in a landmark antitrust trial. The Redmond, Washington-based company is accused of unfairly extending its monopoly in operating systems to the Internet, crushing rivals such as Netscape Communications Corp.

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