

Action urged on film piracy

By CRAIG HENDERSON

HONGKONG film industry leaders have asked the Government to help enforce international copyright regulations following a rise in film piracy, which is costing local movie producers and distributors millions of dollars.

The Motion Picture Industry Association (MPIA) hopes the Government will liaise with overseas authorities and draw their attention to piracy in Canada, Europe, Thailand, Singapore, China and the United States.

The matter has been high on the MPIA's agenda during discussions with the Recreation and Culture Branch over the possible establishment of a film commission.

The MPIA recently began issuing legitimate film producers with certificates of copyright in a bid to stamp out the sale of first-run films to overseas buyers through illegal distributors.

The certificates, similar to bank certificates of credit, are issued to local producers after their credentials and right to register are verified.

The MPIA hopes the certificates will enable companies to successfully prosecute illegitimate overseas distributors for copyright infringements.

MPIA executive director Mr Peter Tsi Ka-kei said delegates from the film industry have met Recreation and Culture Branch officials to discuss the issue several times.

"We'd like the Government to talk directly to overseas governments and bring their attention to piracy of films from Hongkong," Mr Tsi said.

"The MPIA now issues Hongkong film producers with certificates of registration which are unique and difficult to forge.

"In the past, we have simply registered films and given producers registration papers but we found many illegitimate overseas distributors were forging documents and avoiding arrest and prosecution.

"If foreign governments know what to look for in terms of official registration, it will be harder for illegitimate distributors to deny copyright breaches

and easier to prosecute them," he said.

The move follows a Customs and Excise Department operation on Wednesday which smashed a Mongkok-based video pirating and distribution syndicate that was selling copies of first-run movies to buyers in six countries.

Customs officers are still investigating the case and suspect a local movie industry worker had been supplying original 35 mm films to the pirates, who were then able to make high quality copies.

So far, the MPIA has issued about 100 certificates to local film producers.

A government spokesman said officials will meet the MPIA in six weeks to further explore the establishment of a film commission.

"They [the MPIA] have raised a number of concerns with us, including the issue of piracy and copyright breaches," the spokesman said.

"They have also expressed concern over triad involvement in the movie industry."