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Section: Business

U.S. patent protection called key in free trade

By David Wichner
ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Protecting American patents and other intellectual property is a key U.S. priority in free-trade talks around the globe, the nation's top




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patent officer told a group of business leaders Wednesday in Tucson.

"This is what we need to protect in the U.S., because it's where we are advanced. We are still the country that is known as having the most breakthrough technology in the world," said Jon Dudas, undersecretary of the U.S. Commerce Department for intellectual property and director of the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

During talks on new trade agreements,

Dudas said, the United States starts by pressing other countries to follow the Treaty on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, or TRIPs, a World Trade Organization agreement that sets minimal standards for national intellectual property laws.

Trade negotiators then go beyond the TRIPs rules to push for patent

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Patent facts

- Each year, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office receives about 355,000 patent applications and more than 270,000 trademark applications.
- The office issued 98,598 patents in the 2003 fiscal year.
- Roughly 55 percent of U.S. patent applications are filed by U.S. applicants, while the other 45 percent come from other nations.

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protections that mirror U.S. law - an approach Dudas called "TRIPs plus."

Dudas, a guest of Rep. Jim Kolbe, R-Ariz., said trade partners like Japan, Europe, Mexico and Canada have worked closely with the United States to mesh their patent and trademark laws with ours.

Dudas said his office is working with Mexican patent authorities to streamline the patent process through new technology. Intellectual-property protection also is a key component of talks to form a free-trade bloc with Central and South America, he said.

But some countries - particularly India, Egypt and Brazil - have been resistant to aligning their intellectual-property laws with ours, Dudas said, speaking at a Tucson Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce luncheon attended by about 25 business officials.

Rather than adopt a hard line with recalcitrant nations, Dudas said, U.S. officials have tried to show how effective patent laws boost international commerce and help them modernize their intellectual property regulatory systems.

China, which has quickly evolved into an economic powerhouse, poses special legal and cultural challenges to standardizing patent laws, Dudas said.

"China is going to be a huge player" in the intellectual-property arena, Dudas said, adding that it is on track to become one of the most prolific patenting nations in the world.

U.S. officials are pressing China to increase penalties and enforcement for copyright piracy and other intellectual-property crimes, Dudas said.

Also during his visit Wednesday, Dudas presented a U.S. Commerce

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Department Export Achievement Award to Breault Research Organization, a local optics firm that exports products to 35 countries.

In Phoenix on Tuesday, Dudas also announced a \$2 million investment by the Commerce Department's Economic Development Administration in Chicanos por la Causa to help the nonprofit Hispanic group build a commercial and professional office building and a business incubator.

● Contact reporter David Wichner at 573-4181 or dwichner@azstarnet.com.

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