

Network Working Group  
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Editor

A question on Media Type Registrations  
[draft-iesg-media-type-00.txt](#)

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Abstract

This document poses a question to the community on the future of the IANA Media Type Registry. It presents three potential future courses of development and asks that feedback on these be provided to the IESG.

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Media-Type-Registry

May 2005

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## 1. Introduction

The Media type registry currently maintained by IANA at <http://www.iana.org/assignments/media-types/> was originally developed in order to handle the needs of MIME [2]. It has since expanded to handle media types that are carried primarily by RTP; these RTP payloads do not have MIME boundaries and there are cases in which the formats appropriate for RTP cannot be used in traditional MIME contexts. In particular, some of the text types have been contentious because their appearance within a MIME e-mail message would have unexpected results if the MIME parser treated the unknown text type as text/plain.

In a recent proposed update to the registration documents [draft-freed-media-type-reg-04.txt](#) [1], the authors described the history and aim of the update as follows:

"Historical Note The media types registration process was initially defined for the purpose of registering media types for use in the context of the asynchronous Internet mail environment. In this mail environment there is a need to limit the number of possible media types to increase the likelihood of interoperability when the capabilities of the remote mail system are not known. As media types are used in new environments, where the proliferation of media types is not a hindrance to interoperability, the original procedure was excessively restrictive and had to be generalized. This was initially done in [RFC2048](#), but the procedure was still part of the MIME document set. In this revision the media type specification and registration procedure has been moved to this separate document to make it clear it is independent of MIME. It may be desirable to restrict the use of media types to specific environments or to prohibit their use in other environments. This revision attempts for the first time to incorporate such restrictions into media type registrations in a systematic way. See [Section 4.9](#) for additional discussion."

It goes on to say in [section 4.9](#):

"As such, universal support and implementation of a media type is NOT a requirement for registration. If, however, a media type is explicitly intended for limited use, this MUST be noted in its registration. The "Restrictions on Usage" field is provided for this purpose."

The IESG notes that there have been several cases of attempted registration where there was considerable resistance to proposed types where the basic principles of usage by MIME parsers would be violated, even where the "Restrictions on Usage" indicated that the

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media type was not intended for use by MIME. This has been manifested most recently and most strongly for proposed text media types which cannot be treated as text/plain by a parser attempting to fall back in the face of an unknown text type.

This is, of course, in advance of publication of the revision as a BCP, and practice may change after publication. The IESG is concerned, however, that there appears to be a disconnect between the expectations of a community that expects all registrations may be treated similarly and a community that expects protocol-specific registrations to be able to use rules specific to the using protocol.

The IESG would like to solicit further comment on this issue. We put forward the following registry futures as strawmen to prompt discussion, but this document is not intended in this or any revision to create or modify registries; that job is left to BCP candidates that have gone through the usual IETF processes.

## [2.](#) Possible Registry Futures

### [2.1](#) All media type protocols may specify handling.

In the simplest future, this registry retains the current structure and the registration document as currently written becomes a BCP. The IESG expects that in this case registrations written with usage limitations may indicate protocol handling that varies from that originally associated with MIME and the MIME-based registrations. In the text case, for example, a using protocol like RTP could have a text type not appropriate for direct display to a user. If the handling is general, rather than specific to a registration, a document discussing that using protocol's relationship to the registration may be written; an updated [RFC 3555](#) [3], for example, might serve this purpose.

### [2.2](#) MIME handling is the model for other using protocols

In this future, the registry retains the current structure, and the registration document remains largely the same, but there is a more explicit statement that all using protocols registering media types

must use them in ways consonant with the handling by MIME. Any request for registration for which the media type could not be passed with minimal change to a MIME parser would be denied. The registrations would still retain "Usage Limitation" sections, but these could only restrict, not modify, MIME usage.

### [2.3](#) Registry split

In this future, the registry is reverted to a pure MIME registry; other protocols could re-use types that MIME uses but could not propose new types without describing them as part of MIME. A second or multiple other registries are created with their own registration documents and rules. IANA and the registry reviewers would maintain a policy to avoid collisions between the registries, but there would be no other interconnect.

### [3.](#) Comments solicited

Comments on this document should be sent to [iesg@ietf.org](mailto:iesg@ietf.org) or to [ietf@ietf.org](mailto:ietf@ietf.org). The IESG will consider responses at least until July 1, 2005.

#### [4.](#) Security Considerations

This document poses a question to the community and does not specify a protocol subject to attack.





## [5.](#) IANA Considerations

This document has no IANA considerations of its own, though it may affect documents that govern registrations in own or more IANA registries.

## [6.](#) Normative References

- [1] Freed, N. and J. Klensin, "Media Type Specifications and Registration Procedures", [draft-freed-media-type-reg-04](#) (work in progress), April 2005.
- [2] Freed, N. and N. Borenstein, "Multipart Internet Mail Extensions (MIME) Part One: Format of Internet Message Bodies", [RFC 2045](#), November 1996.
- [3] Casner, S. and P. Hoschka, "MIME Type Registration of RTP Payload Formats", [RFC 3555](#), July 2003.

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