

Nature of Patent and Patent Rights

The patent is issued in the name of the United States under the seal of the United States Patent and Trademark Office, and is either signed by the Director of the USPTO or is electronically written thereon and attested by an Office official.

The patent contains a grant to the patentee, and a printed copy of the specification and drawing is annexed to the patent and forms a part of it.

The grant confers “the right to exclude others from making, using, offering for sale, or selling the invention throughout the United States or importing the invention into the United States” and its territories and possessions for which the term of the patent shall be generally 20 years from the date on which the application for the patent was filed in the United States or, if the application contains a specific reference to an earlier filed application under 35 U.S.C. 120, 121 or 365(c), from the date of the earliest such application was filed, and subject to the payment of maintenance fees as provided by law.

The exact nature of the right conferred must be carefully distinguished, and the key is in the words “right to exclude” in the phrase just quoted. The patent does not grant the right to make, use, offer for sale or sell or import the invention but only grants the exclusive nature of the right.

Any person is ordinarily free to make, use, offer for sale or sell or import anything he/she pleases, and a grant from the government is not necessary. The patent only grants the right to exclude others from making, using, offering for sale or selling or importing the invention. Since the patent does not grant the right to make, use, offer for sale, or sell, or import the invention, the patentee's own right to do so is dependent upon the rights of others and whatever general laws might be applicable.

A patentee, merely because he/she has received a patent for an invention, is not thereby authorized to make, use, offer for sale, or sell, or import the invention if doing so would violate any law. An inventor of a new automobile who has obtained a patent thereon would not be entitled to use the patented automobile in violation of the laws of a state requiring a license, nor may a patentee sell an article, the sale of which may be forbidden by a law, merely because a patent has been obtained.

Neither may a patentee make, use, offer for sale, or sell, or import his/her own invention if doing so would infringe the prior rights of others. A patentee may not violate the federal antitrust laws, such as by resale price agreements or entering into combination in restraints of trade, or the pure food and drug laws, by virtue of having a patent. Ordinarily there is nothing that prohibits a patentee from making, using, offering for sale, or selling, or importing his/her own invention, unless he/she thereby infringes another's patent which is still in force. For example, a patent for

an improvement of an original device already patented would be subject to the patent on the device.

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A maintenance fee is due 3 1/2, 7 1/2 and 11 1/2 years after the original grant for all patents issuing from the applications filed on and after December 12, 1980. The maintenance fee must be paid at the stipulated times to maintain the patent in force. After the patent has expired anyone may make, use, offer for sale, or sell or import the invention without permission of the patentee, provided that matter covered by other unexpired patents is not used.

The patent terms may be extended for certain pharmaceuticals and for certain circumstances as provided by law.