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About the OHL

The TAPR Open Hardware License ("OHL") provides a framework for hardware projects that is similar to the one used for [Open Source](#) software. This isn't as straight-forward as it seems because legal concepts that work well for software (such as [copyright](#) and [copyleft](#)) don't neatly fit when dealing with hardware products and the documentation used to create them.

Here is a description, taken from the OHL's Preamble, of how the Open Hardware License works and how to use it:

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The TAPR Open Hardware License ("OHL") agreement provides a legal framework for Open Hardware projects. It may be used for any kind of product, be it a hammer or a computer motherboard, and is TAPR's contribution to the community; anyone may use the OHL for their Open Hardware project. You are free to copy and use this document provided only that you do not change it.

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The OHL addresses unique issues involved in the creation of tangible, physical things, but does not cover software, firmware, or code loaded into programmable devices. A copyright-oriented license such as the [GPL](#) better suits these creations.

How can you use the OHL, or a design based upon it? While the numbered

sections of the agreement take precedence over this preamble, here is a summary:

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- * You may distribute products you make to third parties, if you either include the documentation on which the product is based, or make it available without charge for at least three years to anyone who requests it.
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 - * Include a copyright notice in each file and on printed circuit board artwork.
 - * If you wish to be notified of modifications that others may make, include your email address in a file named "CONTRIB.TXT" or something similar.
- * Any time the OHL requires you to make documentation available to others, you must include all the materials you received from the upstream licensors. In addition, if you have modified the documentation:
 - * You must identify the modifications in a text file (preferably named "CHANGES.TXT") that you include with the documentation. That file must also include a statement like "These modifications are licensed under the TAPR Open Hardware License."
 - * You must include any new files you created, including any manufacturing files (such as Gerber files) you create in the course of making products.
 - * You must include both "before" and "after" versions of all files you modified.
 - * You may include files in proprietary formats, but you must also include open format versions (such as Gerber, ASCII, Postscript, or PDF) if your tools can create them.

The TAPR Noncommercial Hardware License

TAPR has created another license, the [TAPR Noncommercial Hardware License \("NCL"\)](#), which is identical to the OHL apart from adding a limitation that products based on NCL designs may only be made for noncommercial uses. While we appreciate that a commercial use limitation may be appropriate in some cases, we encourage you to use the OHL if you can, as it more closely follows the Open Source software philosophy.

Legal Background

John Ackermann's article

- [Toward Open Source Hardware](#)

explores the legal issues involved with applying open source software concepts to hardware designs. (Reproduced by permission of the University of Dayton Law Review; cite as John R. Ackermann, *Toward Open Source Hardware*, 34 U. Dayton L. Rev. 183 (2009)).

Credits

John Ackermann, N8UR, is the author of the TAPR Open Hardware License. John is an attorney who specializes in software licensing. He was assisted by a number of both active developers and lawyers who reviewed innumerable drafts and provided valuable feedback.

The primary review mechanism was an "OHL Development" mailing list. The members of that list include: Lyle Johnson, KK7P, Bruce Perens, K6BP, Bdale Garbee, KB0G, David Toth, VE3GYQ, Don Jackson, AE5K, Chris Day, AE6VK, Rick Hambly, W2GPS, and Darryl Smith, VK2TDS.

In February, 2007, a public comment period took place, hosted at [Technocrat.net](#). That conversation resulted in a number of improvements to the OHL. You may [review the comments here](#).

John would particularly like to thank Bdale Garbee, Lyle Johnson, Bruce Perens, and especially his colleagues Kirk Johnsen and Professor Robert Lech, for help that went above and beyond the call of duty.



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