

## **INTERNET Acceptable Use Policy**

May 23, 1997

### **Purpose**

The Internet provides a source of information that can benefit every professional discipline represented in the Department of the Interior. It is the policy of the Department that employees whose job performance can be enhanced through use of the Internet be provided access and become proficient in its capabilities. This policy document delineates acceptable use of the Internet by Departmental employees, volunteers, and contractors while using Government-owned or -leased equipment, facilities, Internet addresses, or domain names registered to the Department of the Interior.

### **Background**

The Internet is comprised of thousands of interconnected networks which provide digital pathways to millions of information sites. Because these networks subscribe to a common set of standards and protocols, users have worldwide access to Internet hosts and their associated applications and databases. Electronic search and retrieval tools permit users to gather information and data from a multitude of sources and to communicate with other Internet users who have related interests.

Access to the Internet provides government agencies with the opportunity to locate and use current and historical data from multiple sources worldwide in their decision-making processes. Employees and authorized volunteers and contractors of the Department of the Interior are encouraged to develop the skills necessary to effectively utilize these tools in the performance of their jobs.

### **Scope of the Policy**

This policy applies to Internet access only. It does not cover the requirements, standards, and procedures for the development and implementation of Departmental information sites on the Internet.

The following Departmental Internet users are covered by this policy:

1. Full or part-time employees of the Department of the Interior.
2. Volunteers who are authorized to use Departmental resources to access the Internet.
3. Departmental contractors who are authorized to use Government-owned equipment or facilities.

This policy distinguishes between Internet access performed during normal working hours and that performed on personal time (i.e., on weekends, before and after work, during lunch periods, or during scheduled break periods). This policy applies to Internet access when using Government equipment and facilities, and performed using Internet Protocol addresses and domain names registered to the Department.

## Policy

The Department of the Interior promotes Internet use that enables employees to perform Departmental missions and encourages its employees, volunteers, and contractor personnel to develop Internet skills and knowledge. If an employee's supervisor determines that Internet access is in the best interest of the Government, the employee will be permitted, within the limits set forth below, to use the Internet on personal time to build his/her network search and retrieval skills. Employees who do not require access to the Internet as part of their official duties, may not access the Internet using Departmental facilities under any circumstances. It is expected that employees will use the Internet to improve their job knowledge; to access scientific, technical, and other information on topics which have relevance to the Department; and to communicate with their peers in other Government agencies, academia, and industry. Users should be aware that when access is accomplished using Internet addresses and domain names registered to the Department of the Interior, they may be perceived by others to represent the Department. Users are advised not to use the Internet for any purpose which would reflect negatively on the Department or its employees.

Federal computer systems are for Government use and not for personal use; however, when certain criteria are met, Departmental users are permitted to engage in the following activities:

1. During working hours, access job-related information, as needed, to meet the requirements of their jobs.
2. During working hours, participate in news groups, chat sessions, and E-mail discussion groups (list servers), provided these sessions have a direct relationship to the user's job with the Department. If personal opinions are expressed, a disclaimer should be included stating that this is not an official position of the Department.
3. During personal time, retrieve nonjob-related text and graphics information to develop or enhance Internet-related skills if the office pays a fixed rate for Internet access; that is, the access charge is usage insensitive and if a dial-up connection is made to an Internet access provider it must be within the local calling areas. It is expected that these skills will be used to improve the accomplishment of job-related work assignments. This policy of allowing employees to use Internet resources during nonwork periods is similar to the policy of allowing staff to use library resources on personal time. The use of both types of resources enhances the employee's knowledge and skill in information retrieval, benefits which immediately translate to his or her ability to perform work-related activities. By encouraging employees to explore the Internet, the Department also builds its pool of Internet-literate staff who can then guide and encourage other employees.
4. Employees are prohibited from initiating nonwork-related Internet sessions using Departmental information resources from remote locations. That is, employees shall not dial into Departmental resources from home or other nondepartmental locations for the purpose of participating in nonjob-related Internet activities.

The following uses of the Internet, either during working hours or personal time, using Departmental equipment or facilities, are not allowed:

1. Access, retrieve, or print text and graphics information which exceeds the bounds of generally accepted standards of good taste and ethics.
2. Engage in any unlawful activities or any other activities which would in any way bring

discredit on the Department of the Interior.

3. Engage in personal commercial activities on the Internet, including offering services or merchandise for sale or ordering services or merchandise from on-line vendors.
4. Engage in any activity which would compromise the security of any Government host computer. Host log-in passwords will not be disclosed or shared with other users.
5. Engage in any fund raising activity, endorse any product or services, participate in any lobbying activity, or engage in any active political activity. The prohibition against engaging in political activity does not apply to Presidential appointees who have received Senate confirmation.

### **Supervisory Responsibility**

Supervisors of Departmental employees, volunteers, and contractors will have the final authority in determining whether an employee requires Internet skills to accomplish their assigned duties. Supervisors have the responsibility for:

1. Acquiring Internet access for their employees who need it to conduct the official business of the Department.
2. Determining whether or not Internet access is provided to their employees for a flat fee. If access is provided on a flat fee basis, employees may use the Internet for the activities outlined above. Supervisors should check with the group system or LAN administrator to determine whether their Internet access is acquired at a flat fee.
3. Advising their employees regarding the restriction against personal use of Departmental Internet access resources from other than Departmental facilities.
4. Assuming the responsibility for making the final determination as to the appropriateness of their employee's use of the Internet, when questions arise. This shall include the acceptability of Internet sites visited and the determination of personal time versus official work hours.

### **User Responsibilities**

Use of computer equipment and Internet access to accomplish job responsibilities will always have priority over personal use. In order to avoid capacity problems and to reduce the susceptibility of Department information technology resources to computer viruses, Internet users will comply with the following guidelines.

1. Personal files obtained via the Internet may not be stored on individual PC hard drives or on local area network (LAN) file servers.
2. Official video and voice files should not be downloaded from the Internet except when they will be used to serve an approved Departmental function.

Users are responsible for:

1. Following existing security policies and procedures in their use of Internet services and will refrain from any practices which might jeopardize the Department's computer systems and data files, including but not limited to virus attacks, when downloading files from the Internet.
2. Learning about Internet etiquette, customs, and courtesies, including those procedures and

guidelines to be followed when using remote computer services and transferring files from other computers.

3. Familiarizing themselves with any special requirements for accessing, protecting, and utilizing data, including Privacy Act materials, copyrighted materials, and procurement sensitive data.
4. Conducting themselves in a way that reflects positively on the Department, since they are identified as Departmental employees on the Internet even though they may be using the Internet for personal reasons, as stated above.
5. Being aware, along with their supervisors, whether Internet access is billed on a flat fee rather than a usage sensitive basis.

Individuals using Government equipment to access the Internet are subject to having activities monitored by system or security personnel. Use of this system constitutes consent to security monitoring, and employees should remember that most sessions are not private.

**For information regarding this policy document contact your LAN administrator, supervisor, or Tom Sandman at 202-208-5064.**