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LOCAL NEWS

Library Puts 'Net Policy Into Effect Today

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Sign to surf is now the Yakima Valley Regional Library's motto.

The 19-branch library system begins its new Internet policy today, but some people aren't happy about it.

From now on, library patrons wishing to access the 'Net on the library's 55 terminals will be required to sign a user agreement. Parents of minors will need to specify whether their children can use filtered or unfiltered Web searches.

Filtering software attempts to screen out Internet content considered to be obscene. Critics say filters aren't 100-percent effective and may block constitutionally protected speech.

However, critics of the library's new policy don't like the idea of any unfiltered Internet being available at the library.

The city of Zillah will spend \$300 to mail a 10-question survey to 950 households this month, gauging the community's opinion on the library, Internet filters and the new policy.

"The (survey) question that I think is the most valuable is the one about closing the library if you can't filter all of the Internet," said Zillah Mayor Dan Simmons, who drafted the questionnaire.



KIRK HEDGOT/Yakima Herald-Republic

Anne Haley, director of the Yakima Valley Regional Library, holds some of the 5,000 Internet use forms that will be distributed among libraries and schools. Patrons will be asked to read and sign the form before being allowed to access the Internet.

The city of Selah will have an open meeting at 2 p.m. today in its council chambers to discuss the library's policy with a community task force set up to examine the issue. Last week, Selah city officials discussed canceling the library's contract.

Library Director Anne Haley said the new policy, which was adopted by the library board Nov.

8, protects the freedom of speech guaranteed under the Constitution's First Amendment.

"It's our opinion that this policy would survive a constitutional review," Haley said. "It places control in the hands of parents. It also upholds the moral values of the community. And it maintains access to the full robustness of the Internet to the public."

FILTER SYSTEM ON THE WAY

A Seattle software company is donating the new filter system. **3B**

The library spent \$6,000 printing 10,000 of the 10-page contracts, as well as a smaller pamphlet on guidelines for using the Internet. They are available in English and Spanish. The literature includes rules regarding use and a parent's guide to the Internet.

Haley said the policy mirrors the one adopted by the Loudoun County Public Library in Virginia.

That library faced a legal challenge after placing filters on its Internet system. Organizations with constitutionally protected Web sites sued the library's board in 1997 and won. The library was forced to pay court costs and allow unfiltered Internet access.

"We felt like that was a good precedent," Haley said.

Haley said with the new policy, she hopes the furor will die down. She also knows that may not happen and that may come with the territory.

"The role of the public library is to provide all points of view so people can make up their minds, especially on contentious issues," she said. "If there is not something in a library that you don't agree with, then it's not a good library."