



PLV Statement on Internet Filtering and Content Regulation

Public Libraries Victoria is the peak body for Victorian Public Libraries and represents the interest of public libraries across the State.

Public Libraries in Victoria are faced with the dual responsibility of providing the community with access to the Internet while ensuring that the community and in particular minors are protected from illegal and inappropriate content.

PLV believes that the best approach is to ensure that all users are aware of their responsibility for appropriate use of the internet in public sites and, particularly in the case of children, for parents to teach them to use technology safely so that they can make good choices.

This is entirely consistent with the approach taken by ALIA, the Australian Library and Information Association and NetAlert Ltd (a body established by the Federal Government to provide independent advice and education on Internet safety). ALIA, which works closely with NetAlert, does not recommend the use of filtering technology for public library services.

An ALIA survey of internet access in public libraries found only 18% of local government library services Australia wide use filtering software. The NetAlert "Librarian's guide to Internet safety" for use in Australian public libraries does not advocate filters and recommends the use of education and supervision instead.

Filters are not a simple solution to the problem of inappropriate internet site access, due to their ineffectiveness. They are a very haphazard means of limiting access and will, for example, often restrict access to legitimate sites on breast feeding, breast cancer, medical or disease information, AIDS information, etc.

Filtering software tends to focus on certain topics, and parents may have concerns over a wide range of potential sites and issues. Research has shown that filters effectively act as a form of censorship, particularly when applied on computers used by both adults and children, and this is not in keeping with PLV's support for free and unfettered access to information.

PLV supports the ALIA statement on Online Content Regulation and does not endorse the use of filters to manage online content.

PLV supports those public libraries which have conditions of Internet use consistent with those recommended by ALIA. These include:

- Education programs on the positive and negative aspects of the internet
- Encouraging parents and guardians to take responsibility for supervising their children's internet experience
- Conditions of use policies that specify the conditions of use for children
- Positive links to information on quality web sites
- Considered location of Internet computers within libraries to balance access and privacy

PLV endorses the ALIA statement that "parents and guardians must be encouraged to take responsibility for supervising their children's internet experience".

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