

Media Release

June 6, 2007



Australian Library and Information Association

Linking people with ideas...

Australian Library and Information Association Ltd • PO Box 6335 Kingston ACT 2604 • ALIA House 9-11 Napier Close Deakin ACT 2600
ABN 40 090 953 236 • ph 02 6215 8222 • fx 02 6282 2249 • member direct line 1800 020 071 • <http://alia.org.au> • enquiry@alia.org.au

Unreliable internet filters are concern for libraries

Announcing the release of the latest *Internet Filtering in Public Libraries Survey*, the Australian Library and Information Association welcomed recent statements by the Prime Minister on the role of parental responsibility in ensuring safe access to the internet, but has warned a one-size-fits-all solution for internet filtering could actively compromise legitimate research through the Australian public library network.

The survey, the third conducted by the Association since 2002, shows respondents frequently reported experiences of, and concerns about, unreliability and inaccuracy of filtering software.

“We understand that a number of Government ministers have expressed concerns about children’s safety and the internet,” Sue Hutley, Executive Director of the Association, said. “The Association is continuing to work with national internet safety authority NetAlert and the Government to further the education of parents, carers, children and the broader community on internet safety, but this latest survey highlights concerns with internet filters performance and the risk of reducing the quality of search results by blocking legitimate websites,” she said.

The survey results also show 70% of respondent libraries currently using filters deploy the software at server level and 40% of libraries receive internet access through a wider council network.

“Clearly, this has significant implications for filtering software design requirements,” Ms Hutley said.

“Internet filtering software needs further development and close cooperation with public librarians to ensure features of the software include maximum local control and adaptability, but does not preclude legitimate research and freedom of access to information,” she said.

“Libraries are safe places to access information – skilled staff are on hand to help with an enormous range of information sources. The internet is just one of those resources. Recently, the Prime Minister emphasised the importance of parental responsibility in achieving safe internet access for children. The Association fully supports this position but this is only part of the story for public libraries. We must ensure freedom of access to information for all in the community,” she said.

A 2005 NetAlert study found that the largest percentage of access to the internet by children aged eight to 13 was actually either at home or at school. Ms Hutley said librarians in schools and public libraries were very aware of their duty of care but parental guidance was also vital to ensure children were protected wherever they had access to the internet.

“It is essential that parents play an active role in their children’s internet use and that’s why education for parents is critical,” Ms Hutley said.

“Libraries have to have a flexible strategy for dealing with undesirable online content because we have a diverse range of adult and child users. We must provide both for their right to access information and their safety in doing so,” Ms Hutley said.

Ends

INFORMATION FOR EDITORS

Further information

- Sue Hutley, Executive Director, Australian Library and Information Association 0412 764 922
- Derek Whitehead, Vice President, Australian Library and Information Association and Chair, ALIA Online Content and Regulation Reference Group 0419 996 025

Survey resources

Australian Library and Information Association Internet filtering in public libraries 2007 survey results:
<http://alia.org.au/advocacy/internet.access/>

Australian Library and Information Association Online Content and Regulation policy and information:
www.alia.org.au/advocacy/internet.access

NetAlert Kids online survey:
<http://www.netalert.net.au/02010-kidsonline@home---Internet-use-in-Australia-homes---April-2005.pdf>

Issued on behalf of
Australian Library and Information Association
ALIA House
9-11 Napier Close, Deakin ACT