

September 27, 2006

Memorandum

To: All Employees

From: P. Lynn Scarlett /s/Scarlett

Subject: Appropriate Use of the Internet

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 memorandum reiterates current policy defining appropriate and inappropriate 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.

An ever increasing concern in the workplace today is inappropriate use of the Internet. It has come to our attention through recent reviews of employee internet use conducted by the Inspector General and the Chief Information Officer that some employees are violating Departmental policy regarding appropriate use of the Internet by accessing sexually explicit, gambling, and other inappropriate websites. You are reminded that the use of government equipment and resources, including your time, must be in compliance with standing policies and ethical guidelines. Some of the activities recently reported have significant legal and administrative consequences for those who violate Departmental policy, up to and including dismissal from employment. Violators also may be subject to criminal charges.

The Department's policy allowing limited personal use of government equipment was put in place on June 14, 2000. The policy was revised in 2005 to reflect changes in permitted cell phone use, but with respect to the use of government equipment for personal email and Internet access, the June 14, 2000 policy remains in effect. You can find the policy and a reference to the DM Chapter on "Limited Personal Use of Government Office Equipment and Library Collections (410 DM 2)" by clicking on the links at the end of this document.

Under this policy, employees may make limited personal use of government equipment as long as it occurs on non-duty time, does not interfere with official business, does not adversely impact electronic systems, is not commercial gain activity or is not otherwise prohibited, and the expense to the government is negligible. Some specific restrictions are outlined below:

Employees may make personal (non-commercial) purchases over the Internet, unless the purchase is otherwise prohibited under the restrictions set forth in the Department's policy, provided that all purchased items are sent to a non-government address.

The following activities are prohibited using government equipment and time:

Gambling;

Viewing/downloading sexually explicit material;

Lobbying Congress or any government agency (unless required as part of your official duties);

Political activity (unless allowed under the Hatch Act);

Fundraising for external organizations or purposes (except as required as part of your official duties under applicable statutory authority and bureau policy);

Commercial activities, including purchases for commercial gain, such as day trading (securities) and outside work;

Endorsement of any outside products, services or organizations; and

Live streaming or video streaming music, images, or information.

The following restrictions apply to the personal use of email on government equipment:

Employees using email for personal purposes must not represent themselves as acting in an official capacity;

Broadcast emails or mass mailings are prohibited. Emails may be sent to no more than five addresses;

Employees must use caution when giving out their government email address for personal purposes, particularly when "registering" at various Internet sites; and

Use of bulletin boards for personal use are prohibited.

Additional restrictions apply, as set forth fully in the Department's policy. Email messages and other electronic information may be covered by the Federal Records Act and/or Freedom of Information/Privacy Acts. Employees have no expectation of privacy in these communications resources (e.g., email, faxes, Internet, cell phones, or computers). All activity to and from the Internet is logged and monitored by the Department and Bureaus/Offices. The Department is currently working towards automatically blocking its internet gateways to known inappropriate sites. However, just because an inappropriate site is not blocked does not mean that it is authorized for access. You must use good judgment. Each individual is expected to refrain from accessing inappropriate sites.

Heads of Bureaus and Offices are responsible for ensuring monitoring and enforcement of this policy, as well as taking disciplinary action against violators. Employees who violate this policy will be held accountable, and actions up to and including dismissal from employment and filing of criminal charges are possible.

You are expected to review and understand Departmental policy and related ethical rules of behavior when accessing and using government equipment. Contact your bureau ethics officials, the Departmental Ethics Office, and the Solicitor's Office for assistance in answering any questions you may have regarding the use of government equipment.

Secretary Kempthorne concisely summed it up on his first day in office in his first all employees memorandum related to achieving the highest ethical standards when he advised:

"If in doubt...don't!"