Open Access to Information at the Library

What is San Francisco Public Library's Internet Use Policy?
"The Library does not monitor or control the content of material accessed through the Internet and cannot be held responsible for its contents.…The Library does not monitor an individual's use of the Internet; nor does the Library employ filtering software." For the complete document, see: *sfpl.org/internetpolicy*.

Why doesn't the Library use filters on its computers to block explicit (i.e. sexual or extremely violent) sites on the Internet?
Based upon the First Amendment and the laws of the City and County of San Francisco, we do not restrict open access to information anywhere, including the Internet. Even if content-blocking filters were permitted here, Internet filters have been shown to have limited effectiveness. Designed to block access to information, websites and other materials on the Internet based on the words, images or other content they contain, filters nonetheless fail to block all explicit sites, and they block many sites besides explicit ones. For example, sites about breast cancer and about gays and lesbians are often blocked by filters. Rather than block access to information protected by the First Amendment, the Library, supported by the Library Commission and Board of Supervisors, does not filter Internet content.

What basis does the Library have for allowing open access to the Internet?
- The First Amendment – "*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.*"
- The Library Commission approved SFPL's policy of open Internet access in December 1998.
- The Board of Supervisors approved open access at the Library in October 2001.

What about the fact that children and teens can view explicit content on the Internet at the Library?
- The primary responsibility for rearing children rests with parents, and parents must assume the responsibility for determining what ideas or forms of expression their children are exposed to.
- The Library makes available to children, teens, and parents listings of recommended age-appropriate educational and recreational sites, as well as materials to help educate library users of all ages about safe Internet use. Both sites can be found at http://sfpl.org/kids.

- The following statement governs use of spaces designated for minors: "Computer users will refrain from…[v]iewing of any illegal, offensive, or harmful matter, including but not limited to pornography within any area designated for children or teens." (*www.sfpl.org>About>Rules and Procedures>Internet and Computer Use Rules>Rules and Responsibilities for the Public*)
  "Harmful matter is defined as matter, taken as a whole, which to the average person, applying contemporary statewide standards, appeals to the prurient interest, and is matter which, taken as a whole, depicts or describes in a patently offensive way sexual conduct and which, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value for minors." California Penal Code § 313(a) (2012). (Internet and Computer Use Rules & Policies, Rules and Responsibilities for the Public http://sfpl.org/index.php?pg=2000004301)

Why doesn't the Library ask everyone who is viewing explicit material to sit in one area away from other patrons?
- Library staff do not monitor or ask patrons what they are viewing.
- Library computers are placed throughout the Main and branches to be near staff service points so staff may assist patrons.
- Laptop users may sit wherever there are seats for the public; it isn't possible to control seating when patrons are using their own devices.

If I complain about the person next to me who is viewing explicit material on a Library computer, will you move him/her to another computer?
If your neighbor is viewing legal content (also known as *protected speech*) but you would rather not sit next to him/her, we will seek to provide you with seating in a different location and at another workstation if you are using an SFPL computer.

What has the Library done to protect library users from seeing explicit sites on someone else's computer screen?
- Installed privacy screens in monitors of all desktop computers with Internet access at Main and branches;
- Reviewed furniture and monitor placement;
- Incorporated furniture for recessed monitors (Main Library);
- Incorporated language in computer use guidelines discouraging viewing of explicit sites;
- Limited those allowed to use the Internet in children's and teens' areas to children and teens; and
- Created a click-through statement for Internet users about appropriate viewing:
  "San Francisco Public Library is committed to providing free and equal Internet access to the public without filtering content. We do, however, ask that you respect your fellow library users and refrain from viewing obscene, offensive, and harmful matter, or illegal materials prohibited by law."

Additionally, the Library is considering adding computer furniture in branches that would recess the monitors and is reviewing computer monitor placement in branches.

How can I comment if I disagree with the Library's Internet Use Policy?
- Ask to speak with the branch or floor manager; or
- Fill out a comment form, available at any service desk, and send or give it to Library staff; or
- Contact the City Librarian's office by phone at 557-4236 or in writing at citylibrarian@sfpl.org.

What can I do to fight censorship?
- Stay informed. Follow your state and local legislatures and school and library boards. Express your views to your mayor and elected officials. Visit ALA *Intellectual Freedom and Censorship Q & A* http://www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=basics&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=60610.

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