

November 2, 2005

To: Director of the Department of Industrial Relations

From: Robert Sarmiento

Re: Internet-Use Policy

Overview

The goal of the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) is to improve working conditions for California workers and expand opportunities for employment in California. (California Department of Industrial Relations Home Page) One way to achieve this is using the internet to do research and to acquire information that will help the DIR workforce. Use of the internet will improve the efficiency of the workforce, which in turn will improve DIR itself, which in turn, will benefit all workers throughout California. However, since the internet is so voluminous in size, much care must be taken to ensure that the internet is used only to improve the efficiency and productivity of the work of the DIR workforce. The following is an explanation of the internet policy, including the background concerning internet use in the workplace, the reasons for using the internet, the allowable and prohibited uses of the internet in the workplace, and how this policy will be implemented at DIR.

Background and Problem

Starting in the 1970's, the internet, originally used by governments and colleges to send information electronically, has slowly grown until recently. (Anandarajan, p.45) However, by 1998, sixty million users accessed the internet, and that number is increasing at least twenty percent each month. (Anandarajan, p.45) Even though the internet is used for information transfer, it has also become the largest electronic playground. (Anandarajan, 45) A study showed that ninety percent of websites accessed

by a workforce sample were non-work-related. In addition to the loss of work productivity, networks were clogged, leading to slower access of work-related websites. (Anandarajan, 45) Because of these problems, agencies are analyzing internet access so that it can be fully understood and are implementing policies to manage internet use in the workplace.

Proposed Policy

Below is the policy addressing internet use at the workplace:

The Department of Industrial Relations supports the use of the internet in day-to-day business and to support the Department achieve its goals. The following uses of the internet are permitted:

- 1. For storing and accessing Department information electronically, both for viewing by the Department and by the public, depending on the sensitivity of the information.*
- 2. For accessing information that would assist the user in completing tasks as needed by the Department, or for advancement of knowledge in a user's field.*
- 3. For downloading files and programs (i.e. Adobe Acrobat, printer drivers) that will assist or enhance a user's ability to complete tasks as needed by the Department.*
- 4. For any other uses that would assist in helping the Department achieve its goals.*

The following uses of the internet are prohibited:

- 1. If it interferes with work productivity or a worker's performance.*
- 2. If it adversely affects the efficient operation of the computer system.*
- 3. For accessing the internet for non-work-related activities, such as gaming, shopping, and other non-work-related websites.*
- 4. Uses that would compromise the security of the Department's computer systems or the Department itself.*
- 5. To engage in direct person-to-person file-sharing using file-sharing programs, such as Kazaa or Limewire.*
- 6. To access pornography or other sexually explicit websites, or any other obscene, defamatory, harassing, or discriminatory websites.*
- 7. For any other uses which are contrary to the goals of the Department.*

In general, the Department advocates the use of the internet as a tool to perform the tasks needed to achieve its goals. However, the Department needs to set guidelines to prevent internet uses that would hinder the Department from attaining its goals.

Benefits and Challenges

Existing internet use policies, implemented by various organizations, have been met with varying degrees of success, but nonetheless, management continues to implement an internet-use policy to help workers work more productively, while discouraging internet abuse. (Rosenberg, 164) This policy, while presenting some challenges that will need to be monitored, will help users understand internet use at work, while improving productivity, the Department with improving productivity and helping achieve its goals, and the public with getting more benefits from the Department.

User Benefits

The internet use policy will clearly state what activities users are permitted and prohibited from viewing and accessing on the internet. For example, users who before would view pornography at work would know now that the use is strictly prohibited and may be the grounds to be reprimanded or terminated, so they would stop accessing it. (Rosenberg, 164) In addition, since a policy will be in place, there will be less controversy over what is permitted to be viewed and what will be prohibited. (Koehler, 38) Since users will know that they can access the internet for work-related purposes, they will take advantage of this to improve their skills and knowledge.

Another benefit is that users will see increased productivity and efficiency in their work. Since users will not be distracted by non-work-related material on the internet, they can spend their time focusing on doing their daily tasks. A study conducted showed

that a sample of 386 employees accessed 250,000 websites on one 8-hour day, with ninety percent of the sites being non-work-related. (Anandaraja, 44) Accessing information on the internet will cut down on having to find printed materials or travel to remote sites to find information.

Department Benefits

One benefit for the Department of Industrial Relations as a whole is that the workforce will be more productive and efficient, therefore helping the Department as a whole in attaining its goals. As mentioned earlier, without an internet policy addressing what is permitted and prohibited, users tend to access non-work-related materials and activities. This leads to a loss of productivity for the Department. However, with this internet policy, the Department as a whole can perform more productively now that workers will be performing their tasks better by having them focus on using relevant internet information to complete their tasks. Eliminating non-work-related internet use also reduces spending. (Internet Acceptable Usage Policy Guidelines)

Another benefit is better security from spam, virus attacks, and hackers. Many unsecured agencies and organizations have been attacked or probed by intruders, with resulting losses to productivity and reputation. (Internet Security Policy) Prohibiting the access of non-work-related sites greatly cuts down on the chance that the computer systems will face an attack or a breach of information by hackers or viruses. This will save the Department time and money that will be wasted as a result of an attack. (Curry)

Public Benefit

A more productive and efficient Department of Industrial Relations means that the public's needs in the working sector will be better addressed and serviced. The public

interact with state and local government websites more frequently than the federal government, esp. state government websites. (Rosenberg, 264) Through better efficiency and production on behalf of the Department, the public's needs can be dealt with more quickly, and with better results.

Challenges

One challenge to an effective internet-use policy is that people believe it is an invasion of privacy. According to the survey, a couple of abuses cited by workers are that electronic monitoring is used to increase workload without increasing employee benefits and that electronic monitoring has been used to increase work stress. (Kizza, 186) Another challenge is to decide who should be the authority over internet monitoring. Some believe that since management created and implemented the policy, they should be the ones to monitor internet use. However, others believe that creates a conflict of interest, and that the Information Systems Unit, or even an outside source, should monitor internet use (Rosenberg, 163).

Implementation

First, a review of current internet use in the Department should be done to determine policies will need to be implemented, while taking into account the Department's goals and its line of work. (Hughes; Rosenberg, 163) Next, the Department should let users know of a new internet-use policy and ask for their input. (Hughes; Rosenberg, 163) After the framework of the policy is completed, the Department shall announce and then implement the policy. It then should be observed and updated to accommodate any changes that may be needed.

Conclusion

The purpose of the policy is to make users aware of what internet uses are permitted and prohibited. With this new awareness, users will become more efficient and productive as they use the internet to complete their tasks. As a result, the Department of Industrial Relations will as a whole, function more productively, and will help maintain its goal of helping California with work issues, conditions, and opportunities.

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