

E-mail erotica triggers controversy

VICTORIA (CUP) — Erotica-Animals, Erotica-Children, Erotica-Male, Erotica-Female, Erotica-Gay and Erotica-Bisexual are yours at the push of a button.

Press a few keys in the Internet computer network, and you are invited to look through this file area, Erotica. For some, it's a garden of delights. For others, it's a field ripe for the censor's blade.

Internet's ostensible function is to exchange academic and scientific information around the world. But it also includes files on almost anything imaginable, including the stuff that drives puritans mad.

"It's sex education of the worst kind for our kids," says Dolina Smith, president of Canadians for Decency, who demand the removal of erotic material from the Internet.

"I think we have a responsibility to the society."

With the growth of Internet, the ability to access such files has sparked a debate over the propriety of computer files. One question is whether the elimination of these files is a breach of

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freedom of speech and information, protected by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

"I think this freedom of speech thing has been carried far too far," argues Smith. "Our families are going down, all in the name of freedom of speech."

Internet proponents and civil libertarians would like to allow users access to all files without restriction.

A six-member University of British Columbia task force on the Appropriate Use of Information Technology last September looked into the pornographic contents of Internet.

"I don't think that it's a particular problem," says task force member Shirley Marcus. "If you don't like it you don't have to look at it."

"If you went to turn on your computer it wouldn't be sitting there," she adds, noting that users must actively search out such information.

And people are tapping in.

Boardwatch magazine ran a reader's poll of the best computer boards. Three of the top ten were "Explicit Adult" systems — including Pleasure Dome, based in Tidewater, Virginia.

Pleasure Dome offers electronic access to networks like ThrobNet, SwingNet, StudNet and KinkNet, according to a recent article in Time.

Internet is designed for the free flow of information, but another B.C. university has decided to restrict some

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content. "It is intended to be open to encourage people to do different things," says Worth Johnson, manager of network operations at Simon Fraser University. "The nature of Internet is to allow anything to go on."

SFU decided to exclude anything from their system that was not "scholarly," said Johnson.

Sam Scully, a University of Victoria vice-president, said Internet should be

wide-open for the general transmission of information.

UVic supports the "general right of access of any kind for academic research versus the collective right to protect people from offensive and repugnant things," he says.

There is no test to prove the academic merit of material on the system. If there was, it would likely entail much time to keep up with the rapid input — and much controversy over its interpretations.

In Canada, there is a six per cent growth in the Internet system every month.

"There is no controlling what's getting trafficked," said Johnson. "Over the upcoming years will be a period of creating new processes and rules."

Internet is the "only working anarchy in the world," said Richard Pitt, system administrator for Wimsey, an electronic bulletin board based in Vancouver.

Atomic rats

CALGARY (CUP) — The University of Calgary suspended a medical researcher's permit to use radioactive materials after finding waste from radioactive rats in campus garbage.

Perry Surdhar, manager of the university's safety office, said officers found the waste during a routine inspection at the university's Health Sciences building. The researcher, who was not named, also broke regulations by taking research rats containing radioactive chemicals from a nearby hospital to the medical school.

"They didn't have authorization to use that particular isotope in the Health Sciences centre," said Surdhar.

The materials found in the garbage were indium-113 and technetium-99, chemical tags used to trace the movement of other chemicals within an animal's body. Surdhar said he did not know the details of the research.

The chemicals found their way into the garbage in the rat's contaminated bedding, feces, and urine.

"It was not the raw materials that were found, only the materials from the rats," Surdhar said.

The problem was brought to the attention of the university's Radiation Safety Committee, which recommended the physicist's permit to use radioactive isotopes be suspended.

The committee decided to make an example of the case to teach professors

that safety standards must be strictly adhered to, said Director of Risk Management Jennifer Yip Choy.

"We don't need the Atomic Energy Control Board (of Canada) here every week," she said. "If the AECB finds a university is not following procedures, they can make our lives miserable."

The strong penalty — a three-month suspension — has effectively stopped research in the physician's lab. Yip Choy pointed out that, contrary to a previous report in the Calgary Herald, the university did not order the lab shut down.

However, the doctor cannot continue the experiments he was conducting without the use of radioactive materials.

Yip Choy called the situation a non-issue, adding that the waste was not considered a hazard to the public. "More problematic was that his technicians were not trained to handle radioactive substances, although they had been requested to attend training for some time," she said.

"He knew his staff had to be trained," Surdhar said. "There is no cost for the training program, but he did not follow up. Since the incident, the staff has been trained."

The physician appealed the suspension, which runs Oct. 1 until Dec. 31, but was denied.

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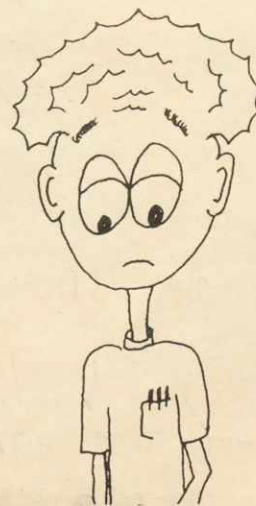
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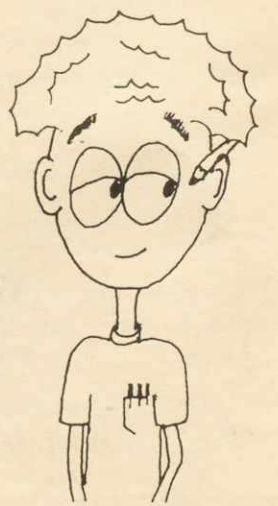
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