
PERSONAL USE OF THE INTERNET/E-MAIL

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1 Why is the IRS permitting limited personal use of the Internet/E-Mail?

Personal use policies on Internet and e-mail use are now in place in Treasury and other government agencies. The adoption of this policy is recognition of the changing nature of communication and our desire to provide a supportive work environment.



Q2 Who can take advantage of this new privilege?

The new policy applies to any IRS employee who already has access to these resources for business purposes. It does not expand Internet or e-mail access to those who do not otherwise have it.



Q3 When can I access the Internet for personal use?

During non-work hours. This includes lunch, break, before and after work, weekends and holidays. Access should be for reasonable duration and frequency. Also, while it is difficult to control the receipt of personal e-mails, time spent responding to personal e-mails should be confined to non-work hours, wherever possible.



Q4 Why does this policy prohibit access to my personal e-mail accounts through the Internet?

This type of access was prohibited prior to the new policy and continues to be prohibited in the new policy to protect IRS systems from unacceptable risk. Access to personal e-mail accounts through the Internet exposes IRS systems to an unacceptable risk of the virus attacks that are often spread by e-mail. Instead, by allowing the use of IRS e-mail accounts for personal messages, we minimize the exposure of our systems to virus attacks.



Q5 Will I have the right to privacy while using the Internet or e-mail for personal use?

No. IRS employees do not have a right of privacy while using government information technology equipment/resources. This includes accessing the Internet and sending and receiving e-mails. Unlike use of our Intranet, which is considered an integral part of our internal communication resources

and does include an expectation of privacy for users, Internet and e-mail use are not private or anonymous. If you need to maintain your privacy, you should avoid personal use of these resources.



Q6 Will personal use of the Internet be monitored?

Yes. To ensure that the Service minimizes its risk and maintains the integrity of its networks, we are establishing systems capable of blocking access to inappropriate sites and of monitoring Internet use at individual workstations. This monitoring will ensure that we identify and correct violations of the policy that could expose the IRS to security and systems risks or represent other prohibited practices.

Monitoring ensures a high level of confidence that the IRS is using information technology resources appropriately. This is especially important for the Service due to the high level of oversight related to our information technology investments.



Q7 Where can I find out more about the rules regarding use of the Internet?

You can get more details by reading the **IRS Policy on Limited Personal Use of Government Information Technology Equipment/Resources**. Appendix A of this policy contains specific examples of inappropriate personal use. A copy of this policy is posted on the Intranet at <http://nhq.no.irs.gov/dcos/news.asp>. In addition, this link includes a copy of Deputy Commissioner Wenzel's memorandum to IRS executives asking them to communicate to eligible employees the responsibilities that accompany this new privilege.



Q8 Does the new policy allow me to send e-mail to a family member or friend using my irs.gov e-mail account?

Yes. The new policy permits you to use your irs.gov e-mail account to send and receive personal e-mails as long as they do not violate any of the prohibitions outlined in the policy. The new policy does not allow you to access your personal e-mail account (AOL, hotmail, etc.) through the IRS Internet connection; this practice continues to be prohibited based on system security concerns (see Question 4 for more information).



Q9 Why am I blocked from accessing certain Internet sites even when I am using the Internet on personal time?

As part of the implementation of the new "limited personal use policy" the IRS installed software that blocks categories of Internet sites that are generally inappropriate for accessing from government equipment at any time (including when an employee is using the Internet personally). The categories currently blocked are as follows:

Adult Sexually Explicit	Hate Speech
Hacking	Gambling
Games	Criminal Skills
Web-Based Email	Glamour and Intimate Apparel
Remote Proxies	Hosting Sites
Weapons	

Sites in these categories should generally never be accessed; however, if in the course of your **business responsibilities**, you are blocked from a site you feel is critical to doing your job, access to that site may be requested with your manager's approval (procedures for these requests can be found at www.csirc.web.irs.gov).



Q10 Why am I sometimes blocked from a website that does not seem to fall into the categories listed in Question 9?

The placement of a website into a specific category is done by the software based on several criteria developed by the vendor and occasionally these categorizations may be incorrect. If you feel a specific site should not be blocked, please submit a request to have the site blocking reviewed (procedures for these requests can be found at www.csirc.web.irs.gov).



Q11 Does the policy allow the faxing of personal documents to long distance numbers from a government fax machine?

No. Because a government fax machine uses a government telephone line, the IRS guidelines/GSA regulations regarding personal telephone use apply to faxes also. Allowable personal faxes would be limited to those faxes going to numbers in the local commuting area or to 800 numbers.



Q12 Does the new policy allow listening to the radio through the Internet?

No. Listening to the radio through the Internet is not allowed by the new policy because this would constitute a continuous data stream and continuous data streams are prohibited due to their potential impact on system capacity.



Q13 Does the new policy allow an employee to access EBAY and other similar sites?

Posting of items for sale on EBAY or other similar sites is not allowed by the new policy because the sale of goods and services could support a "for profit" activity and would therefore be prohibited (see Appendix A of the policy item 2.j). However, occasional browsing or buying from EBAY or similar sites during non-duty hours would be an acceptable use that is authorized by the new policy.



Q14 Does the limited personal use policy allow an employee to file their personal tax return with their Government computer equipment and Internet access using the Free File Alliance?

Employees may use IRS Internet technology and equipment for filing their personal tax returns during non-work hours using the Free File Alliance. However, the use of IRS Internet technology and equipment to file tax returns for friends or relatives using the Free File Alliance is not permitted, even during non-duty hours.

If you have any other questions, please send them to email address [*DCOS](#).



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