



County of Ottawa

INSTANT MESSAGING & PEER-TO-PEER FILE SHARING POLICY

I. POLICY

Communication with various internal and external organizations and individuals is recognized as an important function in the County of Ottawa. To support that requirement, a secure, reliable infrastructure that transmits and processes both voice and data is essential. Failure to adequately protect this infrastructure could result in denial of service. Instant Messaging (IM) and Peer-to-Peer (P2P) File Sharing are unsecured technologies that expose this infrastructure to threats such as viruses, pop-ups, SPAM IM (SPIM), intrusion and data theft.

Instant Messaging uses a client program that hooks to an IM service allowing real-time communications. Due to the nature of the technology, antivirus monitoring of IM traffic is particularly difficult. Instant messengers can be configured for file sharing allowing exploitation by hackers who can access files or configure the computer to send notifications each time the computer is online. Malicious programs may modify configuration settings enabling unrestricted access to the computer. Most IM solutions lack encryption capability which exposes confidential information to monitoring.

P2P File sharing software such as KaZaA, Gnutella, and Napster networks have been used to download copyrighted materials without permission. It often includes spyware, adware and other malicious programs that can seriously degrade system operation and be very difficult to eliminate, often requiring a complete system rebuild.

The use of the County's computer/telecommunications system is reserved solely for the conduct of County business. With the exception of incidental personal non-business use, all communications should be for County business purposes.

The use of County computers or other devices owned, operated and/or connected within the County's network are strictly prohibited from using IM and P2P File Sharing excluding those cases as noted in the Procedure section.

II. STATUTORY REFERENCES

None.

III. COUNTY LEGISLATIVE OR HISTORICAL REFERENCES

Board of Commissioners Resolution Number and Policy Adoption Date: _____

Board of Commissioners Review Date and Resolution Number: _____

Name and Date of Last Committee Review: _____



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PROCEDURE

1. Refer to IT policy regarding the County's right to all information transmitted or stored on the County's computer and communication system.
2. Violations of this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment. In addition, the County may refer cases to the appropriate authorities for civil and/or criminal prosecution.
3. This policy applies to all County computers accessing the internet via the County's network to include external access via VPN or other means. Computers that do not connect to the internet via County's network are exempt from this policy.
 - a. Instant Messaging services provided by the IT department are allowed for internal use.
 - b. Internet IM services will be authorized by the IT Director if a proven requirement exists and the service offers sufficient security to guard against the before mentioned threats.

REVIEW PERIOD

The Information Technology Director will review these policies and procedures and report to the Planning and Policy Committee at least once every two years.