General Information Regarding Parental Controls

There are so many variations and combinations of computers, operating systems, software, and Internet Service Providers that it is virtually impossible to provide "one size fits all" instructions for protecting your family and computer environment. This document was designed to help you search for the right answers for your individual needs. It provides basic information on some of the most commonly used software and Internet services. It is not a comprehensive listing of all available resources and is not an endorsement by the Attorney General of any product or service.

IMPORTANT: None of these parental control practices are foolproof. Kids who want to get around them CAN find a way to do so, EVEN IF you use all of the parental control software options. The single most important thing you can do is understand and be involved in your children's Internet activity. Sit down with them and review any profiles they have created or visited. Talk to them about their online safety, and teach them to be responsible when they are online.

Protecting Your Computer

The first level of protection on any computer is through the computer's operating system. The operating system controls your computer and software.

The two most widely used operating systems are Microsoft Windows® and Apple Macintosh®. Windows and Mac each have several versions and releases. There are many options for restricting access to your individual computer and its software applications via the operating system. For more information on Microsoft Windows operating systems, visit www.microsoft.com. For Apple Mac, visit www.apple.com.

Controlling Internet Restrictions Using Your Internet Browser

The next level of protection is to set restrictions in the Internet browser. The browser is the software from which you view websites. The most commonly used browsers are Internet Explorer®, Firefox, and Safari®. Within each browser, there are a variety of ways to "lock down" access to dangerous websites.

- **Internet Explorer** – This browser is generally pre-installed with Windows-based computers. It provides secure browsing with Content Advisor. This feature allows parents several options to approve or deny access to individual websites. You can select websites by category from the Content Advisor's automatic defaults, or create a custom list of approved websites for your family's needs. For more information, visit www.microsoft.com.

- **Firefox** – This browser offers several security filtering options through add-ons. Add-ons are free mini-applications offered from Mozilla that work to customize and personalize this browser. To find a filtering add-on that is right for you and your family, visit addons.mozilla.org.

- **Safari** – This Mac-based browser allows parents to control web content, time limits, mail, chat, and browsing access using separate user accounts. Working in conjunction with the Mac operating system, user accounts can be set up individually to enable custom parental controls. For more information, visit www.apple.com.

It is very important that you always use the most current version of your browser, and that you regularly check for software and security updates.

Internet Service Providers

An Internet Service Provider, or ISP, is a company that offers its customers access to the Internet. There are many ISPs available for you to choose from. You might want to consider selecting a provider that offers software with built-in parental controls. Here is a list of three different types of Internet Service Providers in Idaho that provide built-in controls:

- Cable ONE® provides Internet cable service to its customers. A built-in option of this service called WebStop provides for Internet content filtering, which allows you to control the types of content your children access online. There is a fee for this service, in addition to your Cable ONE Internet connection costs. For more information, visit www.cableone.net.

- Qwest High-Speed Internet® service provides DSL (Digital Subscriber Line) service to its customers, and is used in conjunction with Windows Live Family Safety for content filtering. For more information, visit www.qwest.com.

- America Online® (AOL) provides dial-up access to its customers. You can add child accounts through the Parental Controls options for content filtering, time limit options, and web activity reports. For more information, visit www.aol.com.

Wireless Internet

A wireless network allows you to connect a mobile device, such as your laptop, to your home network through a wireless access device. It can be easy to do and is very convenient. However, wireless connections can cause a potential threat to your home network and your personal information. It is important that you properly secure your network against unauthorized individuals.

The easiest way to secure your wireless network is to use WPA (Wi-Fi Protected Access) or WEP (Wireless Encryption Protocol) encryption. These forms of encryption scramble the data sent over the wireless signal and can only be de-scrambled with the correct security key. Without knowing this security key, it is difficult to use the data being sent wirelessly.

For more information about securing your wireless network, visit the Idaho Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force at www.icacidaho.org or contact your Internet Service Provider.

Instant Messaging

Instant messaging allows kids to connect online and "chat" with each other using pop-up conversation windows. Seemingly innocent information can turn into a dangerous situation very quickly if your child begins to "chat" or instant message (IM) someone they do not know.

Most commonly, your children will use the instant messenger that comes packaged with their social networking website, such as Facebook or MySpace. (For more information on these and other social networking websites, please read our *Parents' Guide to Social Networking Websites* manual.) However, some instant messengers come in the form of free software packages, such as Yahoo!® Messenger and AOL Instant Messenger (AIM®), that can be downloaded and installed to your computer. For this variety of instant messaging, make sure that your children are using "friend" or "buddy lists," and only allow them to add family and friends whom they know. These features are designed to help you "lock out" strangers from your children's instant messages.

Parental Control Software

Regardless of whether your Internet Service Provider has built-in parental control software, you may wish to look into acquiring additional parental control software. Parental control software can provide protection against inappropriate websites, whether they are visited by accident or deliberately. Many packages offer website blocking, content filtering, online time management, instant message and chat room recording, e-mail monitoring, and much more. Some software downloads are free, while others are available for purchase, with prices ranging from $0 - $100.00.

Although there are many parental control software packages available, here are links to some sites that offer parental control software packages:

- Net Nanny® www.netnanny.com
- CyberPatrol® www.cyberpatrol.com
- Safe Eyes® www.internetsafety.com
- OnlineFamily.Norton® www.onlinefamily.norton.com
- Blue Coat® K9 Web Protection www.k9webprotection.com

Other Helpful Resources

The Internet has many wonderful things to offer. That's why it is so important to be involved in your children's Internet activity, while allowing them the freedom to discover. Here are some additional resources for information that will provide you and your children a safer digital world:

- ProtecTeens™ from the Idaho Office of Attorney General www.ag.idaho.gov
- Idaho Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force www.icacidaho.org
- National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® www.missingkids.com
- OnGuard Online www.onguardonline.gov
- Netsmartz® www.netsmartz.org
- i-SAFE™ www.isafe.org
- Web Wise Kids® www.webwisekids.org
- Internet Keep Safe Coalition® www.ikeepsafe.org
- CyberSmart!® www.cybersmart.org
- GetNetWise www.getnetwise.org