

# GUIDANCE FOR UNIT WEBSITES

After considerable discussion and review, the BSA national council has issued the "Guidance for Unit Websites" below. These guidelines address a few vital items pertaining to unit Websites. District Webmasters will be allowed to link to these sites if they follow these guidelines. The Boy Scouts of America provides the following advice for units using privately owned Web sites and e-mail accounts to communicate information about Scouting.

## Decorum

Scouters should exercise propriety and good taste online. Material that will be posted to a unit site or sent from a unit e-mail account should be reviewed by at least three adult members of the unit committee. Access (the ability to place material on the site or send messages from the account) should be controlled by an adult who is responsible to the committee.

## Youth Protection

**Names, and especially contact information pertaining to youth members, should *never* be gathered or published over the Internet. Additionally, photos should never identify a youth by name**

There's a federal law (Children's Online Privacy Protection Act) that explicitly prohibits using the Internet for publishing or collecting personal information for children under 13 without written consent from a parent (a signed letter). No contact information for scouts under the age of 13 should be published on any District or Unit site. We do not allow publication of contact information for youth even with parental consent and even if they're 13-17 years of age. For areas of the Scouting program that may have a need, such as the Order of the Arrow, the only contact information published, should be a generic email address that is redirected to the Scout. For example, if the Lodge wishes to have email addresses for key leadership positions, the email should be something like: [chapterchief@chapter.org](mailto:chapterchief@chapter.org), then have the mail redirected to the appropriate person.

## Copyright

Do not "borrow" (without permission) content for use in unit Web sites. Written permission should always be obtained. Even when material is declared to be "free" or "public domain;" it might not be.

## National Capital Area Council Links to Units

When considering whether to link to a unit Web site, the National Capital Area Council, via the district Webmasters, will assess the unit's Website to ensure it complies with the guidelines.

## On-Line "Conversation"

Chat, guest books, and bulletin boards are three forms of interactivity that are not permitted for districts pages or unit sites because they require dedicated resources to monitor and control them sufficiently.

**Chat Rooms.** These are on-line forums in which users "converse" by typing messages to one another in real time. Recent advances have also made it possible to audio- or videoconference on the Internet. The first concern for districts should be youth protection issues; also "chat" makes it impossible for districts to control the text content of their sites. Because conversations take place in real time, messages are immediately posted to the site for others to view. Also, because chat participants are anonymous, often there is much less discretion exercised than in most forms of conversation.

The Council doesn't allow district pages or unit sites to use "live conversation" " technology altogether.

**Guest Books.** Guest book programs allow not allowed.

**Bulletin Boards and News Groups.** These are a form of chat in slow motion: Users post messages and others may read and respond at a later time. Bulletin boards have the same inherent risks as chat. The Council does not allow bulletin boards and news groups.