



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

# Finance

SENATOR CHUCK GRASSLEY, OF IOWA - CHAIRMAN

<http://finance.senate.gov>

## MEMORANDUM

To: Reporters and Editors  
Re: IRS employees' personal use of the Internet  
Da: Friday, June 20, 2003

In May 2001, Sen. Chuck Grassley, chairman of the Committee on Finance, expressed concern over audit reports showing "extensive" personal use of the Internet by IRS employees. The Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) found that over a seven-day period, slightly more than half of IRS employees' time spent on the Internet was for personal use (8,250 hours -- or 51 percent -- of 16,275 hours). Web sites viewed included those devoted to stock trading, chat rooms, streaming media, sports, sexually explicit content and gambling. After Grassley expressed concern, the IRS implemented a new policy prohibiting certain Internet uses.

A new TIGTA report states that despite the new policy, IRS "employee abuse of the Internet is still widespread." In one week, IRS employees representing 19,581 computer addresses accessed inappropriate categories. Of those addresses, 8,204 were visiting Web sites with sexually explicit materials; 8,231 were visiting chat rooms. The report said "a relatively small number of employees appear to be chronic abusers." Over 28 percent of the potentially inappropriate accesses made in the one-week period were from 122 computer addresses.

Grassley made the following comment on the new report.

"This is a classic case of people getting an inch and taking a mile. The IRS policy on personal Internet use is pretty generous. IRS employees can use the Internet for personal use, within reason. But clearly some employees are abusing that generous policy and making chumps out of the taxpayers who fund their salaries. If you do the math, it looks like 122 IRS employees do nothing but visit inappropriate Web sites. Of course that's wrong. Nobody should collect a government salary to sit on their behinds and play around in chat rooms, or worse, all day. The IRS should weed out the rotten apples who give the IRS a bad name and the taxpayers lousy service.

"I'm especially troubled that this is the second time that TIGTA has reported on inappropriate Internet usage at the IRS. The IRS is responsible for enforcing all kinds of rules for taxpayers. Honest taxpayers appreciate this function. To protect its integrity, the IRS must be able to enforce the rules it sets for its own employees. IRS rules on Internet usage are clear and comprehensive. They've been distributed to all employees. The fact that IRS employees persist in accessing inappropriate sites is stunning. I agree with the senior IRS official who called it offensive. Further,

it appears that the IRS periodically turns off the software it purchased to block inappropriate sites. While I'm not a computer engineer, it seems that for the software to work it must be turned on. I expect the agency to do a much better job of training employees on Internet usage, on deploying blocking software effectively, and on monitoring inappropriate usage. I'm pleased to see that IRS agreed with all five of the sensible recommendations that TIGTA made."