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## **China Requires Censorship Software on New PCs**

By [ANDREW JACOBS](#)

BEIJING — [China](#) has issued a sweeping directive requiring all personal computers sold in the country to include sophisticated software that can filter out pornography and other “unhealthy information” from the Internet.

The software, which manufacturers must install on all new PCs starting July 1, would allow the government to regularly update computers with an ever-changing list of banned Web sites.

The rules, issued last month, ratchet up Internet restrictions that are already among the most stringent in the world. China regularly blocks Web sites that discuss the [Dalai Lama](#), the 1989 crackdown on Tiananmen Square protesters, and the [Falun Gong](#), the banned spiritual movement.

But free-speech advocates say they fear the new software could make it even more difficult for China’s 300 million Internet users to obtain uncensored news and information.

“This is a very bad thing,” said Charles Mok, chairman of the Hong Kong chapter of the [Internet Society](#), an international advisory group on Internet standards. “It’s like downloading spyware onto your computer, but the government is the spy.”

Called [Green Dam](#) — a reference to slogans that describe a smut-free Internet as “green” — the software is designed to filter out sexually explicit images and words, according to the company that designed it. Computer experts, however, warn that once installed, the software could be directed to block all manner of content or allow the government to monitor Internet use and collect personal information.

Details of the new regulations, which were posted Monday on a government Web site, were first reported by The Wall Street Journal.

PC makers that serve the Chinese market, among them [Dell](#), Lenovo and [Hewlett-Packard](#), said they were studying the new rules and declined to comment. But privately, industry executives in the United States said they were unnerved by the new rules, which were issued by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology with no consultation and no advance warning.

Beyond the nettlesome issue of abetting government censorship, they said six weeks was not enough time to

shift production on such a large scale. "Many of us are going to take it in the neck with this mandate," said one executive. "It has put people into five-alarm mode."

This is not the first time that foreign companies have been enlisted in government efforts to police the Internet. [Google](#) already removes politically forbidden results yielded by its popular search engine, [Microsoft](#) allows censors to block content on its blog service, and [Yahoo](#) was widely criticized for turning over information that was used to jail a journalist.

"I would advise dissidents to buy computers before July 1," said Clothilde Le Coz, the head of the Internet freedom desk of Reporters Without Borders.

More than 40 million personal computers were sold last year in China, one of the fastest growing markets. Despite the slowing economy, industry analysts expect that figure to rise by 3 percent this year.

A group of industry representatives met with American officials Monday to express their displeasure with the new rules, said Susan N. Stevenson, a spokeswoman for the United States Embassy in Beijing. "We view any attempt to restrict the free flow of information with great concern," she said.

Zhang Chenming, general manager of Jinhui Computer System Engineering, a company that helped create Green Dam, said worries that the software could be used to censor a broad range of content or monitor Internet use were overblown. He insisted that the software, which neutralizes programs designed to override China's so-called Great Firewall, could simply be deleted or temporarily turned off by the user. "A parent can still use this computer to go to porn," he said.

Although the directive is somewhat imprecise and suggests that manufacturers can provide the software as a compact disc, it also says that it must be installed on computer hard drives as a backup file. The five-point circular uses the word "preinstall" repeatedly and the first clause unequivocally states: "Imported computers shall preinstall the latest available version of the 'Green Dam' software before they are sold in China."

Manufacturers complain that they have had been given little guidance by Chinese authorities. "The wording may be intentionally vague, but the message is clear: we have no choice in the matter," said one computer executive who spoke on condition of anonymity because some companies are hoping they can persuade the government to ease the requirements.

Industry experts and civil libertarians say they are worried the software may simply be a Trojan horse for greater Internet control. The software developers have ties to China's military and public security agencies, they point out, and Green Dam's backers say the effort is supported by Li Changchun, the country's chief propaganda official and a member of the decision-making body of the Communist Party, the Politburo Standing Committee.

The software will be provided free, paid for by the government, and according to the official Green Dam Web site, it has already been downloaded 3.2 million times. That figure includes thousands of schools that were

required to install the software by the end of May. The site claims that Chinese manufacturers, including Lenovo, Inspur and Hedy, have already agreed to install 52 million copies of the software on new computers.

In recent months China has tightened its Internet restrictions, including an “antivulgarity” campaign that has closed down thousands of pornographic sites but also nonsexual sites, including some of the most popular bulletin boards and blog hosts. China already employs more than 30,000 censors and thousands who “guide public opinion” by flooding bulletin boards with comments favorable to the Communist Party.

Last week, as the 20th anniversary of the military crackdown on the Tiananmen Square protests approached, the government blocked a host of Internet services, including [Twitter](#), Microsoft’s [live.com](#) and Flickr, a photo-sharing site, though by Monday evening, these sites had become available again. [YouTube](#) has been inaccessible in China outside Hong Kong since March.

Even beyond ethical concerns, those who have tested the new software describe it as technically flawed. An American software engineer said it led machines to crash frequently. Others worry that it could leave tens of millions of computers vulnerable to hackers. So far, at least, there is no version for the Linux operating system and for [Apple’s](#) Macintosh system.

The directive makes no mention of the special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macao, but one industry association executive said companies had been told that these areas are exempt from the new rules.

On Monday, Green Dam’s own Web site offered a hint of discontent over the filtering software. On the bulletin board section of the site, one writer described it as a “Web devil” and several users complained that pornographic images slipped through or that their computers had become painfully slow. “It seems pretty lousy so far,” one posting said. “It’s not very powerful; I can’t surf the Internet normally and it’s affecting the operation of other software.”

By Monday night, however, most of the comments had been deleted.

*Zhang Jing and Xiyun Yang contributed research.*

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