

# **Amendment to the July 2000 *Instructions to Depository Libraries***

*(Amended 2003)*

## **Chapter 7: Public Service, Section A. Access**

### **A. Access**

Free access as defined by GPO means that any member of the general public can use Government information products in all media at the library without impediments. Providing free access by the general public to the resources of the documents collection, including electronic resources, is a fundamental obligation of all Federal depository libraries (except for the highest State appellate court libraries).

During a depository library inspection, LPS uses a functional approach to determine compliance with the Minimum Technical Requirements for Computer Workstations. Inspectors focus on the library's ability to provide public access to CD-ROMs, the FDLP Electronic Collection and GPO Access. The method selected by the depository library to meet this public access requirement is a local determination.

Access policies, posting of signs, World Wide Web pages, and public service hours for depository patrons must conform to this requirement. Depository libraries must ensure that their security or access policies, or those of their parent bodies, do not hinder public access to depository materials.

The library is always encouraged to provide free and uninhibited public access; however, local depository library administrators may set implementation policies for public access. If the library determines a necessary security precaution is to require identification for use of library resources by public patrons, the library may ask for identification. Staff must be mindful of local, state, and Federal privacy laws.

Depository libraries shall post a sign or the depository emblem in a prominent location, preferably visible from the exterior of the library, indicating the library is a Federal depository and Government information products can be used by the general public without charge. Free decals can be obtained by writing to: U.S. Government Printing Office, Promotion and Advertising Branch, Stop: SM, Washington, DC 20401.

Signage or any verbal, electronic, or tangible message that limits access to a depository library must be amended to exempt members of the public wishing to use the library's depository collection. Requests for recommendations on appropriate signage may be directed to the Chief, Depository Services, at [asklps@gpo.gov](mailto:asklps@gpo.gov).

Depositories are not required to serve patrons who do not have a depository-related need to be in the library. Depository users must adhere to the same standards of behavior expected of other library patrons. Libraries that implement age restrictions usually do so for reasons that should be handled by a library's code of conduct policy. Use of the depository collection cannot be used as a pretext to circumvent library policies or Title 44, USC, Chapter 19.

GPO recognizes legitimate security concerns of depository libraries and has permitted various methods for administrators to heighten security for their facilities and personnel. Permissible actions include asking for patrons for identification, asking users to sign a guest register, asking questions that screen users to make sure that the library has what they need, and even escorting users to the depository collection.

Such actions in no way violate the responsibility of depository libraries to provide free access to the depository collection to the general public under 44 USC section 1911. Under a strict interpretation of the statute, the public patron may be limited to using only the depository collection. Additionally, depository libraries have the right to bar or remove any individual who poses a threat to library staff, other patrons, or the security of their collections.

The library director or the director's designee should ensure that all appropriate employees are aware of the free access requirements of Federal depository libraries. If there is any question that access procedures at a depository could be seen as inhibiting free public access, the library should contact GPO at the address below:

Chief, Depository Services  
Library Programs Service (SLLD)  
U.S. Government Printing Office  
Washington, DC 20401  
Phone: (202) 512-1119  
Fax: (202) 512-1432  
E-mail: [asklps@gpo.gov](mailto:asklps@gpo.gov)

Libraries that offer night and weekend service hours to their primary clientele must provide comparable service hours to depository patrons.