

Freedom of Information Act Web page now on the Internet

A popular government without popular information or the means of acquiring it is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own governors, must arm themselves with the power knowledge gives.

— James Madison

The Department of Energy Richland Operations Office and Office of River Protection are entering the electronic age with the debut of the Freedom of Information Act Web page on the Internet.



The Freedom of Information Act Web site, www.hanford.gov/FOIA/

Besides being very attractive, the Web site is packed with information. It provides the rules and regulations associated with FOIA and the Privacy Act, plus a citizens' guide, links to the various Hanford reading rooms, points of contact, links to other DOE sites and the capability of submitting a request electronically.

Dorothy Riehle, the DOE FOIA officer, is excited about the new site. "This is a win-win opportunity for DOE and its customers," said Riehle. "It's easier for the staff to deal with information requests and it's easier for the public to submit a request for information. The new Web site is a tremendous information resource for everyone."

The *Freedom of Information Act*, Title 5, United States Code, Section 552, was signed into law on July 4, 1966, by President Lyndon Johnson. The FOIA has since been amended in 1974, 1986, and most recently with the *Electronic Freedom of Information Act Amendments of 1996*.

Lyndon Johnson pronounced in his statement issued at the time he signed the FOIA into law, "This legislation springs from one of our most essential principles: a democracy works best when the people have all the information that the security of the nation permits."

The FOIA establishes the premise that government information should be accessible to the people. Before the law was signed in 1966, the burden was on the requester to demonstrate a need to know, and there were no judicial remedies for those denied access.

With the passage of the FOIA, the standard of a need to know has become a *right* to know, and the burden has shifted to the government to prove why records should not be disclosed. Judicial remedies are also provided. ♦