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GPO RELEASES FINAL REPORT ON ASSESSMENT OF ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT INFORMATION PRODUCTS

The Government Printing Office (GPO) has released the final report of a 9-month survey entitled Assessment of Electronic Government Information Products. The survey, commissioned by GPO from the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS), was prepared by an NCLIS contractor, Westat, Inc. The complete report is available via GPO Access, GPO's acclaimed website, at **www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/nclisassessment/report.html**. It is also available from the NCLIS website at **www.nclis.gov/news/news.html**.

The survey was undertaken to collect information on Federal agency plans and practices related to the growing use of electronic formats and mediums to disseminate Government information, and the implications of these trends for GPO's Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP). While the library community strongly supports the increasing availability of Government information in electronic formats, the proliferation of mediums and formats has also imposed new burdens and responsibilities in terms of equipment, training, and staffing needs.

Under the FDLP, Government information in both conventional and electronic formats is made available by GPO to more than 1,350 participating libraries nationwide for the free use of the public. In 1998, GPO distributed 14.4 million copies of approximately 39,000 tangible products in print, microform, and CD-ROM formats to depository libraries. However, the principal vehicle for information dissemination to the libraries today is **GPO Access** (**www.access.gpo.gov**). Approximately 70 **GPO Access** applications make information available from more than 1,000 databases from all three branches of the Government, representing more than 92,000 individual titles. **GPO Access** also provides links to an additional 45,000 titles on other Federal websites. Monthly document retrievals today average approximately 19 million.

The survey covered information products from 24 different entities in all three branches of the Federal Government, including a number of congressional committees, the Supreme Court, and most of the cabinet departments. Approximately three-quarters of all survey instruments were returned completed.

The final report makes 16 key findings. The survey identified the most prevalent mediums used to disseminate Government information, as well as the most prevalent formats, noting that these medium and format standards are “common agency practice rather than agency-mandated.” The survey found that “the most prevalent types of mediums are the web, paper, CD-ROM, and bulletin board systems; [and] the most prevalent formats are HTML, PDF, GIF, JPEG, TIFF, and ASCII.” The survey found that “some . . . agencies are exploring a range of innovative formats and web design approaches for electronic Government information products.”

At the same time, the survey found that “there is an overall lack of Government information policy guiding electronic publishing, dissemination, permanent public access, or information life cycle management,” and that “responsibility for electronic publishing within agencies is decentralized, diffuse, and unclear.” The report says that “the concept of permanent public access is not well understood,” and that “there is a lack of understanding of what ensuring authenticity [of Government information in electronic formats] entails.”

Commenting on the release of the report, Public Printer Michael F. DiMario and Superintendent of Documents Francis. J. Buckley, Jr., jointly stated, “In the current information dissemination policy environment, there is an increasingly critical need for a means of public access to electronic information produced by all three branches of the Government that is effective, comprehensive, authentic, and permanent. Today, the only program in the Government that can guarantee those principles for the American people is the Federal Depository Library Program. This survey will be useful as we continue to transition this important program to an electronic future that is useful to depository libraries and the public we serve.”

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