Access Denied: Government Web Sites: the Disappearing Act?

Susan L. Kendall, San Jose State University
Access Denied

Government Web Sites – the disappearing act?
In 2001, the LA Times reported:

"For months, after Bush jettisoned thousands of documents that former President Clinton had placed on the site, the White House home page had been little more than a place holder on the information superhighway...Clicking an old White House link offering Clinton media briefings, for instance, returned the message: Due to the change of administration, all publications have been removed from this server."

LA Times. Sept 1, 2001. pg A15
Government Web sites like this:

The link you just selected (http://www.npr.gov/) was once available from the White House Web Site during the Presidency of William Jefferson Clinton. This link has not been maintained because the web site is an historical record and is no longer being updated.

Although this link no longer works, it is possible that the content may still exist on the site that hosted the content at the time the link originally was made. Suggestion: type the address, shown in the link, into your browser's address window.

You'll be returned to your previous page in 15 seconds or click on the button below to return now.

Return

National Archives and Records Administration
clinton.library@nara.gov
In a change of administration, website disappearance is not limited to the previous office holder, but can also include agencies.
Agency Web Sites like this:

Where did ERIC/REC go?

In the future, you'll use one URL, http://www.eric.ed.gov to:
1. search the ERIC database
2. search the ERIC Calendar of Education-Related Conferences
3. link to the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS) to

Notice to ERIC Database Contributors, Partners, and Vendors

The U.S. Department of Education required that ERIC/REC telephone services and Web site close on December 19, 2003. The Clearinghouse will close permanently on December 31, 2003. We thank you for your support and patronage for the past 36 years.

http://www.indiana.edu/~eric_rec/
Why did the sites go?

• Web sites for the federal government are a relatively new thing.

• Ok, so it started during the Clinton administration, in the early 90s.
Reasons why sites disappear

• Change in administration.
• Agencies focus on the present – to accomplish their legislated missions.
• New directions in policy.
• Reorganization may cause a new title for an agency, thus a new URL for the agency.
Reasons why sites disappear

• Departments or agencies met their goal and have disbanded.
• Moved to a different server.
• Different software – e.g. html/pdf/etc.
• Or, they did not have a preservation plan for their websites.
Example of local agency & websites

• Santa Clara, CA health coalition produced Community Assessment handbook up to 1999.

• In 2000, the handbook went on-line & was not available in print
Here is what you see today

- The online version is for 2004.
- The 2000 & 2002 versions are no longer on the site.
- When asked about the earlier versions, the response was who would want an earlier version?

http://www.hospitalcouncil.net/upload/
2004_Community_Health_Assessment_Report_Santa_Clara_County.pdf
What is being done to preserve these sites?
Several libraries and organizations have set up archival sites.

The University of North Texas Libraries (UNT) has established CyberCemetery for defunct sites.

http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/
University of Illinois, Chicago project

• Electronic Research Collection
  – http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/
  – A partnership between the University library and the US State Department.
  – Also provides reference service to these products.
Web-At-Risk project

• Partnership between:
  – California Digital Library (Univ. of California)
  – University of North Texas
  – New York University

• Additional assistance from:
  – Stanford
  – San Diego Supercomputing Center
  – Arizona State Library
  – Library of Congress
Goal of the Web-at Risk Project

• To develop tools that enable librarians and archivists to capture, curate, preserve, and provide access to web-based government and political information.

• The primary focus of the collection is state and local government information, but may include web documents from federal and international government as well as non-profit sources.
For more information:

Project is just beginning. Check out their wiki:

http://wiki.cdlib.org/WebAtRisk/tiki-index.php

Are there any other organizations capturing government website information?
The Internet Archive

- Developed to archive Internet websites
- The main search feature is called the Wayback Machine
The Wayback machine--
Sometimes it does not go “wayback”
For the Coast Guard, now a part of Homeland Security, old sites are not found:

Blocked Site Error.

http://www.uscg.mil is not available in the Wayback Machine. Try another request or click here to see if the page is available, live, on the Web.
http://www.uscg.mil
See the FAQs for more info and help, or contact us.
LOCKSS

- Lots of copies keep stuff safe (LOCKSS)
- Pilot project at GPO
- Investigating government e-journals and archiving techniques

http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/fdlp/lockss/index.html
What can we do?

• Join the ALA government publications roundtable listserv (govdoc-l) for recent discussions on web site preservation

• Add **Free Government Information blog** to your rss feeds [http://freegovinfo.info/blog](http://freegovinfo.info/blog)
  – This is an excellent site that states current issues in thoughtful contexts.
  – Because it’s a blog, people can easily comment.
  – And more importantly what agency or legislator should be contacted is noted.
In the words of President James Madison

“Knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.”

U.S. Federal Depository Library Program Vision statement
Sites Reference List

• US National Archives
  http://www.archives.gov/index.html

• Santa Clara Health Assessment

• University of North Texas Libraries’ CyberCemetery
  http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/
Sites Reference List

• University of Illinois – State Department Project [http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/](http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/)
Sites Reference List

• LOCKSS --
  http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/fdlp/lockss/index.html

• Free Government Information blog --
  http://freeegovinfo.info/blog

• ERIC/REC --
  http://www.indiana.edu/~eric_rec/
Thank you!

Sue Kendall
San Jose State University
susan.kendall@sjsu.edu

This presentation is posted at
http://calneva.blogspot.com/