# China Defends Net Filtering Software Amid Outcry

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BEIJING (AP) -- Chinese state media on Thursday issued an unprecedented defense of newly required Internet filtering software that must be packaged with every computer sold in China starting next month, after a public outcry at home and abroad.

Although the government says the software is aimed at blocking violence and pornography, users who have tried it say it prevents access to a wide range of topics, from discussions of homosexuality to images of comic book characters such as Garfield the cat.

Chinese authorities rarely feel compelled to justify their tight controls on the world's largest population of Internet users. They are quick to block content challenging the ruling Communist Party's positions on democratic reforms, religious freedom and policies toward Tibet.

Put on the defensive, state broadcaster CCTV announced on its noon news program Thursday that a "vast number of parents and experts" had endorsed the "Green Dam-Youth Escort" filtering software that must be packaged with all computers sold in China from July 1.
The official Communist Party newspaper Guangming Daily ran an almost identical report and praised the software as a breakthrough in the drive for "civilized Internet management and access."

The government has told computer makers the software must either be installed on the hard drive or enclosed on a compact disc. PC makers will be required to tell authorities how many computers they have shipped with the software, which is made by a Chinese developer under contract with the government.

Many industry experts have privately questioned the security of computers and stored information exposed to the software. The Washington-based Computer & Communications Industry Association has said that while blocking pornography is understandable, the technology can easily be expanded into more general censorship.

"The main difference is that it takes censorship down to the level of the individual computer," said Rebecca Mackinnon, a professor at the University of Hong Kong who studies censorship in the Chinese media and online. That step "very directly affects the individual, and what the individual can do on their computer, how they interface with the Internet," Mackinnon said.

Although porn sites are initially targeted, the program could be used to block other

Web sites, including those based on keywords rather than specific Web addresses. Its developer said users could disable blocking of any site or even uninstall the software altogether.

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