China expands Internet controls

(AP) -- China has issued new regulations that expand its Internet controls by tightening procedures for domain name registration.

The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology posted the new rules over the weekend, part of a three-phase plan to target what it called pornography accessible through cell phones.

The regulations require telecom companies and Internet service providers to carry out "complete and thorough" checks to determine if Web sites are officially registered. Any Web sites that have not registered with the ministry should be taken off the Internet, the order says.

But the new rules have the potential to freeze out thousands of legitimate Web sites by creating a pre-approved "whitelist" of sites.

It also tightens the registration process for domain names. Any service provider must have a business license and the Web site itself must also have a business license or be registered - which would appear to prohibit sites set up by individuals.

It was unclear if the new rules would apply to foreign Web sites, though many sites have already been blocked by China's Internet authorities, including Youtube, Facebook, Twitter and host of other media and news Web sites.

Beijing's pervasive policing of cyberspace and attempts to block the Internet - among the world's most stringent - are often referred to as the "Great Firewall of China."

The communist government says the main targets of its Web censorship are pornography, gambling and other sites deemed harmful to society. Critics, however, say that often acts as cover for detecting and blocking sensitive political content.

Earlier this year, China had backed down from a requirement for new computers to be loaded with a controversial Internet-filtering software known as Green Dam Youth escort after a major outcry from Chinese citizens and computer companies. That software had also been introduced as a filter against porn.

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