

A Position Statement on Discarding and Disposing of Library Materials

Public libraries adopt roles based on the community they serve. Many public libraries serve as repositories for local information. Others support the research needs of citizens searching their family trees. Most public libraries support the educational needs of students, at least through the high school years. Others serve as the child's first step in learning readiness. The information citizens need for their daily lives in the areas of health, shelter, finance and community make up a large portion of the resources public libraries maintain. Public libraries are also in the business of providing "the right book, for the right reader, at the right time." As the technology changes the information provided takes on many different forms. PeachNet and GAILEO have enhanced the amount of information that can be made available in our facilities. But, public libraries are still very much about books. For the most part, those books are valuable for the information they contain. When that information becomes outdated, when the book becomes tattered and torn, or when that information the book contains is no longer needed, the book is removed from the library's collection. This de-acquisition is done differently by each library and depends on the roles the library has chosen for its community and the funding level the institution enjoys. Once the de-acquisition or weeding occurs, the disposal of the book occurs. This disposal, governed by state and local law and local board policy, allows for the sale of the books and the proceeds of that sale to be used to replenish the library's collection. Libraries differ in the disposition of books remaining after a public sale because of many factors including number, space and staff resources. However a library chooses to accomplish this disposal, it is the end of a careful, professional process done to keep the library's book collection responsive to the community's needs. Disposal of these books can be misinterpreted by citizens, who view the book as having value outside the information it contains or as having value to someone other than the library and its customers. It is important to remember that shelf space is one of the public library's most expensive costs. That shelf space must be used for books that are factually correct, in good condition and used by the community. The public library's role in our society demands that we provide our citizens with the best possible current collections. This means that our stock must be rotated, that some must be discarded and librarians must make difficult decisions as stewards of the public dollar.

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