Introduction

The MINITEX/MnLINK ILL Committee recently revised the ILL Policy Database to include information regarding handling of overdue and lost materials. The information we have gathered from the responses indicates that libraries differ significantly in the way overdue, damaged, and lost materials are handled. This document represents an attempt to clarify procedures and policies and to offer guidance in the handling of overdue, damaged, and lost materials for both the borrower and the lender.

The guiding principle behind handling of all overdue, damaged, and lost materials is that the borrowing library is responsible for the items until their return and receipt by the lending library. Although the advent of MnLINK resulted in an increase in the direct requesting of materials between libraries, including unmediated patron initiated requests, this does not change the responsibility of the borrowing library for materials their patrons have requested.

In developing this report the Committee was mindful of section 4.9 of the “Interlibrary Loan Code for the United States” that states:

Sec. 4.9 The requesting library is responsible for borrowed material from the time it leaves the supplying library until it has been returned to and received by the supplying library. This includes all material shipped directly to and/or returned by the user. If damage or loss occurs, the requesting library is responsible for compensation or replacement, in accordance with the preference of the supplying library.

Executive Summary

The following are recommendations for monitoring, processing, and paying for overdue, damaged, and lost materials:

Recommendations:

- The Committee strongly recommends that all libraries implement a means of automatically generating overdue notices for their patrons who have borrowed interlibrary loan materials. The borrowing library retains responsibility for all communication with their patrons.

- The committee strongly recommends that lending libraries send an invoice not later than six months after the due date. The borrowing library may request an invoice from the lending library at any point that they determine the item is lost (or damaged). If the lending library does not provide an invoice within six months of the due date (or within six months after being requested by the borrowing library), the borrowing library may assume there will be no charge for the item.
- The committee strongly recommends that once a request has been updated to “checked in” on the interlibrary loan system of the lending library, the borrowing library is no longer responsible for the item.

- The committee strongly recommends that the lending library inform the borrowing library as soon as they have determined an item has been damaged. It is also important that the borrowing library contact the lending library immediately if an item received through interlibrary loan is damaged. The lending library is responsible for determining the appropriate charge to assess on damaged materials. It is critical that both the borrowing and lending libraries package ILL materials properly to prevent damage that may occur in shipping.

For a more detailed explanation of the rationale behind the recommendations, please review the complete report, found below.

To view information on any participating library in MINITEX, you can access the MnLINK/MINITEX ILL Policy Database at [http://www.minitex.umn.edu/illpolicy/](http://www.minitex.umn.edu/illpolicy/).

### Detailed Recommendations

#### Recommendation on automatic generation of overdues for patrons of borrowing libraries:

*The Committee strongly recommends that all libraries implement a means of automatically generating overdue notices for their patrons who have borrowed interlibrary loan materials.*

The MINITEX/MnLINK ILL Committee recommendation included in the report “Interlibrary Loan through the MnLINK Gateway: Policy Recommendations” approved by the MnLINK Steering Committee in July, 2002, states that the borrowing library is responsible for generating and sending overdue notices to patrons.

The “Interlibrary Loan Code for the United States Explanatory Supplement” Section 4.10, recommends that “the requesting library should develop a method for monitoring due dates so that material can be returned to and checked in at the supplying library by the due date assigned by the supplying library.”

Many libraries create brief bibliographic and item records in their Integrated Library System (ILS) to track the interlibrary loan materials in use by their patrons. A record of the item including the title, author, and due date is linked to the patron, providing a circulation record for the transaction. Overdues are automatically generated by the ILS system.

If your library is part of an integrated library system that includes an ILL component, the circulation transaction might be automatically generated by the system. If you use a stand-alone ILL management system, you should also check its functionality to determine whether it automatically creates overdue notices to be sent to your patrons.

#### Recommendation on timeline for sending invoices on lost items:
The committee strongly recommends that lending libraries send an invoice not later than six months after the due date. The borrowing library may request an invoice from the lending library at any point that they determine the item is lost (or damaged). If the lending library does not provide an invoice within six months of the due date (or within six months after being requested by the borrowing library), the borrowing library may assume there will be no charge for the item. Consequences for non-payment by a borrowing library may have repercussions such as the discontinuation of service to that location by the lending library.

Libraries differ significantly on the timeline for declaring an item lost and sending a bill. The feedback from the ILL Policy Database indicates that the range was from two weeks to six months or longer after the due date. Sending an invoice for a lost item too soon can cause unnecessary paperwork on both ends while waiting too long can create difficulties in getting the material back from the patron.

The committee wishes to emphasize that the borrowing library is responsible for paying for the item in a timely manner and not necessarily waiting for payment from the patron before reimbursing the lending library. Refunds for items returned after payment should not be assumed, and are subject to the policies of the owning library.

Recommendation on invoices for a closed request:

The committee strongly recommends that once a request has been updated to “checked in” on the interlibrary loan system of the lending library, the borrowing library is no longer responsible for the item.

There are instances when the borrowing library receives an invoice for an item that has already been updated to the ISO “checked-in” status on the automated interlibrary loan system. The interlibrary loan request has been updated to returned by the borrower and the lender has closed the request upon the return of the item. This circumstance does not occur frequently; however, it does merit mention as one circumstance whereby the borrowing library is no longer responsible for the material.

Recommendation on handling of damaged materials:

The committee strongly recommends that the lending library inform the borrowing library as soon as they have determined that an item has been damaged. It is also important that the borrowing library contact the lending library immediately if an item they have received through interlibrary loan is damaged. The lending library is responsible for determining the appropriate charge to assess on damaged materials. It is critical that both the borrowing and lending libraries package ILL materials properly to prevent damage that may occur in shipping.

The borrowing library is responsible for physical damage to the item, at the discretion of the lending library. Damage may include: obvious damage to the physical item, pages missing, highlighting, underlining or writing in books, end notes or guides not returned with audiovisual items, or parts missing. The lending library may assess a minor charge (an amount to be determined by the lending library) if the item is repairable (such as ordering replacement pages), or a replacement fee if the damage is to an integral part of the item. The lending library should contact the borrowing library about a missing parts problem before a bill is issued, as it is
frequently possible to retrieve the missing part from the borrowing patron. If the item remains usable, the lending library may assess a charge for damage. If a part is missing from the item, the lending library may assess a part replacement fee. If the item is unusable, the lending library may assess an item replacement fee.

The “Interlibrary Loan Code for the United States Explanatory Supplement” Section 4.9 and 4.13 address the issue of damage occurring during shipment. It states “Although the percentage is very small, some material is lost or damaged at some point along the route from the supplier and back again. The requesting library’s responsibility for this loss is based on the concept that if the request had not been made, the material would not have left the suppliers shelf, and thus would not have been put at risk.” Lenders should use discretion in sending out fragile items and borrowers receiving such items need to adhere to any restrictions such as “in library use only” to minimize the possibility of damage. Borrowers and lenders should make note of obvious damage when filling a request or receiving an item. Staff on both the requesting and receiving end should properly package materials to avoid damage in shipping.

**Conclusion**

Communication between borrowing and lending libraries is key to the successful handling of overdue, damaged, and lost materials. Borrowing libraries should provide lenders with updates on the status of overdue, damaged, and lost materials. Lending libraries need to send invoices within a reasonable timeline and alert the borrowing library of any problem related to the item on loan. The borrowing library is responsible for communicating both with the lending library and their patron.

Because our online interlibrary loan systems are the primary mechanism for communication regarding the progress of a request between the borrower and lender, the Committee wishes to emphasize the importance of properly updating requests to the appropriate status. This maintains the integrity of the data found in these systems, and makes them more reliable witnesses to the true status of loaned material. This is particularly important when multiple systems are used to track loans (i.e. items checked out in both an ILS system and an ILL management system). The two systems may reflect different statuses if care is not taken when updating, resulting in uncertainty as to whether a book has been returned, or not, and requiring additional staff time to resolve the matter.

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**Related Links:**

Interlibrary Loan Code for the United States
[http://www.ala.org/ala/rusa/rusaprotools/referenceguide/interlibrary.htm](http://www.ala.org/ala/rusa/rusaprotools/referenceguide/interlibrary.htm)

Interlibrary Loan Code for the United States Explanatory Supplement
[http://www.ala.org/ala/rusa/rusaprotools/referenceguide/interlibraryloancode.htm](http://www.ala.org/ala/rusa/rusaprotools/referenceguide/interlibraryloancode.htm)

Interlibrary Loan through the MnLINK Gateway: Policy Recommendations

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