



Protecting privacy. Promoting transparency.

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SOCIAL NETWORKING CHANGING THE FACE OF PRIVACY

Victoria—Information and Privacy Commissioner Elizabeth Denham has a message for all British Columbians: think before you click. In her first Annual Report, released today, she stated that, contrary to earlier fears, internet users and social networkers are very concerned about “unknown eyes with hidden agendas” accessing their personal information.

“In addition to organizations’ obligations under the law, it is still up to each one of us to draw a firm line regarding how much we share and to jealously guard personal information that might be vulnerable to abuse”, Commissioner Denham stated. “This means not posting or emailing vital personal details and remembering that the Internet never forgets.”

The Commissioner’s approach to privacy challenges is to be proactive, and toward that end, she has created a separate unit to specifically review new policies and proposed electronic networks to ensure that citizen privacy is respected and protected, and to deter serious breaches.

Proactive release of government information without the need for a formal access to information request is a key priority of the Commissioner. “Openness is disarming”, she stated, and “this is especially true for government’s relationships with its citizens.” Providing citizens with relevant and timely information through varied channels like government websites and social media is needed to promote public trust and equip citizens with the information they need to judge for themselves the performance of government.

“Proactive disclosure must become part of the culture” the Commissioner stated. “Public bodies that jealously guard innocuous information create opponents out of potential allies.”

Another key strategy of the office is effective public education. “We are one of a privileged few societies that afford their citizen’s strong legal protection for both access to information and privacy rights,” the Commissioner stated.

“We should not take these rights for granted, and we want to ensure the public clearly understands their rights and how they apply in the real world.”

The annual workload of the OIPC remains high and comparable to last year. In fiscal 2010-2011, the OIPC closed 5971 files, and of those 1137 were formal access to information appeals, access and privacy complaints and Commissioner initiated investigations.

The full text of the report can be read at www.oipc.bc.ca.

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