



NEWS RELEASE
For Immediate Release
Nov. 15, 2012

Police must make changes to licence plate scanning technology, says B.C. Privacy Commissioner

VICTORIA—The Victoria Police Department must make changes to its Automated Licence Plate Recognition program to comply with privacy laws, says B.C.'s Information and Privacy Commissioner.

“Modern technologies such as ALPR can be effective law enforcement tools; however, the use of these tools in British Columbia must comply with *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*,” said Commissioner Elizabeth Denham.

Using cameras mounted to squad cars, Victoria police use ALPR to photograph, scan and record licence plate numbers, including time and geographic location. The ALPR system compares this data to an on-board database of plate numbers provided by the RCMP called an “alert listing.” A “hit” occurs when there is a match between a licence plate scan and the alert listing. If there is no match, the item is categorized as a “non-hit.”

At the end of a shift, a “daily scan” record is returned to the RCMP, which contains the personal information of every registered owner of a vehicle scanned by the ALPR system. This record contains information related both to hits and to non-hits. The RCMP’s current practice is to de-identify non-hit data.

After a detailed investigation, Commissioner Denham concluded that the disclosure of non-hit data to the RCMP is not authorized by FIPPA.

“Non-hit data is personal information about the suspicionless activities of citizens -- information that the police have no reason to believe relates to criminal activity. This information is not serving a law enforcement purpose and therefore, VicPD cannot disclose it to the RCMP,” said Denham.

The Commissioner recommended the ALPR system be reconfigured to delete non-hit data immediately after the system determines that it is not a match.

She also established that future use or disclosure of non-hit data by municipal police would not be authorized under B.C. law.

“Law enforcement agencies have recently discussed retaining non-hit data. Collecting personal information for traffic enforcement and identifying stolen vehicles does not extend to retaining data on the law-abiding activities of citizens just in case it may be useful in the future,” said Denham.

The Commissioner’s investigation was prompted in part by a written submission from three individuals, who expressed concern about the police use of ALPR in British Columbia and its potential use as a tracking tool.

“There are concerns that this technology could be used as a surveillance tool, where data about the location and activities of citizens is used for purposes other than that for which it was collected. In light of these concerns, I felt it was important to provide citizens with a comprehensive look into how this technology is being used,” Denham wrote.

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