



Feature

Canada's Privacy Law and the North

The annual meeting of information and privacy commissioners from across Canada will take place later this month in Yellowknife. The Privacy Commissioner of Canada, George Radwanski, will take this opportunity to highlight the importance of privacy issues to Canadians living in the North.

Canada has a new federal privacy law that protects your personal information in the private sector.

In the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut, this law applies to all businesses and organizations that collect, use or disclose personal information in the course of commercial activities.

Under the new law, individuals have the right to:

- ask organizations why the information is being collected;
- refuse to give consent to organizations to collect personal information;
- have personal information used only for the purposes for which it was initially collected;
- request access to see their own personal information; and
- challenge the accuracy and completeness of this information, and have it corrected, if necessary.

In the rest of Canada, the law currently applies only to the personal information of customers and employees of federally regulated organizations such as banks, telephone companies, broadcasters, cable companies and air carriers. It also applies to the disclosure of personal information for profit or gain across provincial or national borders by any company where the information is the subject of the transaction.

In the North, the law applies to the whole commercial private sector, since all local businesses in the territories are considered to be federal works, undertakings and businesses and under the jurisdiction of the federal Parliament.

Personal health information such as medical treatment, prescription or insurance records will also be covered by the law beginning January 1, 2002.

On January 1, 2004, the law will extend to *all* interprovincial or international disclosures of personal information in the course of a commercial activity, as well as to *all* provincially regulated businesses not covered by a provincial law judged to be substantially similar to the federal law.

The Privacy Commissioner of Canada investigates complaints individuals may have concerning the handling of their personal information. To file a complaint or to find out more about the new *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act*, call the Office of the Privacy Commissioner toll-free at 1-800-282-1376, visit the office's Web site at www.privcom.gc.ca or write the Office of the Privacy Commissioner, 112 Kent St., Ottawa, ON K1A 1H3.

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