



Office of the Ombudsman/Child & Youth Advocate



OFFICE OF THE
INFORMATION & PRIVACY
COMMISSIONER
— for —
British Columbia

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NEW BRUNSWICK & BRITISH COLUMBIA WATCHDOGS CRITICIZE THEIR HEALTH MINISTRIES FOR LAX DATA SECURITY

VICTORIA (BC) & FREDERICTON (CNB)—Separate reports issued concurrently today by New Brunswick's Ombudsman and BC's Information and Privacy Commissioner have found that their governments failed to protect the personal health information of BC and New Brunswick residents when a courier lost tapes containing health information.

In October 2007, a courier shipment from New Brunswick to BC of computer tapes containing individuals' personal health information did not arrive, but the affected individuals were not advised until more than six weeks after the tapes left New Brunswick. The tapes, which were never found, contained information of several hundred New Brunswick and BC residents, but were not protected by encryption.

"New Brunswick's Health Department failed to ensure that personal health information was protected through encryption and that's not good enough", said Ombudsman Bernard Richard, adding, "I'm satisfied, however, that the Department has taken proper steps to ensure this doesn't happen again." The Ombudsman also added that, "personal health information is especially sensitive and deserves the best protection of all, particularly in an electronic environment."

David Loukidelis, BC's commissioner, agreed: "BC's health ministry should not have been couriering around unprotected tapes of personal health information like this. It doesn't matter that the tapes can only be read using technology that's not commonly available. Proper encryption is the basic standard for portable data storage like this."

Appropriate steps have been taken by both the BC and New Brunswick health departments to improve data security when exchanging health insurance claims information and Loukidelis and Richard expressed appreciation for the co-operation shown by the two departments. Bernard Richard added, "We agree this incident highlights the need for all government departments in New Brunswick and BC to ensure they properly protect personal information in transit. Citizens expect better and they deserve it. It's also the law."

Copies of the NB report are available online at <http://www.gnb.ca> keyword: **Ombudsman**.

Copies of the B.C. report are available online at:

http://www.oipc.bc.ca/orders/investigation_reports/InvestigationReportF08-02.pdf

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