

For immediate release

May 6, 2024

Newly appointed BC Information and Privacy Commissioner Michael Harvey statement on Privacy Awareness Week

VICTORIA— Michael Harvey, Information and Privacy Commissioner for British Columbia, issued the following statement to mark Privacy Awareness Week (May 6-10):

“This morning, I had the honour of being sworn in as the Information and Privacy Commissioner for British Columbia. I took an oath to fulfill this office’s mandate to protect and promote British Columbians’ privacy and access rights. At the outset of my term as Commissioner, I appreciate the magnitude of what this work entails and its vital importance.

This year’s Privacy Awareness Week (PAW) theme, ‘Privacy and technology: Improving transparency, accountability, and security,’ highlights the urgency of our mandate at a time when technological tools facilitate much of our daily lives – how we interact with businesses, government, and each other.

The pandemic rapidly and profoundly changed our relationship with technology. The need to respond to a global threat meant that solutions had to be developed fast. The pandemic has ended, but the pace of change has not, as a new transformation has emerged: artificial intelligence systems are proliferating across all sectors. At the same time, there is a deteriorating threat environment – cybercriminals are ever more innovative themselves in trying to get at our valuable personal information.

Rapid technological innovation has tremendous social benefits, but if public and private organizations alike do not consider privacy at every stage of their activities and remain constantly vigilant, then privacy breaches will continue to increase. We have seen the financial costs and operational problems these breaches cost but the real threat is more fundamental: trust. If people’s trust is lost in organizations who collect and use their personal information, we will fail to thrive in the information age.

Fortunately, privacy and innovation are not mutually exclusive. Personal information is the central resource of the information economy and companies who innovate on how to protect it will have a competitive edge. Of course, personal information is not just a resource – privacy is a fundamental right that is part of the foundation of our democratic society. With innovations in this space, all organizations will have the opportunity to build relationships based on trust with the people they serve.

How can organizations build that trust? Amid such rapid and sweeping changes, this year's PAW theme reminds us of the importance of fundamental privacy principles – such as transparency, accountability, and security – that only grow in relevance as technology advances. I call on organizations across BC to ensure that they're adhering to these principles in how they collect, use, and disclose personal information. That's what our laws, BC's *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and the *Personal Information Protection Act*, require, and what people should be able to expect.

My office stands by to help organizations through this process, and I look forward to working with public bodies and organizations across BC to build and improve on their privacy management programs.”

OIPC training

The OIPC is holding free in-person training sessions on BC's *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FIPPA) and the *Personal Information Protection Act* (PIPA):

FIPPA

- *Victoria*
When: May 7, 9:30am-12pm
Where: St. Ann's Academy
- *Kamloops*
When: May 22, 9:30am-12pm
Where: Thompson Rivers University

PIPA

- *Victoria*
When: May 8, 9:30am-12pm
Where: St. Ann's Academy

About Privacy Awareness Week

Privacy Awareness Week is a global effort coordinated by members of the Asia Pacific Privacy Authorities (APPA) to promote awareness of privacy issues and the importance of protecting personal information.

The OIPC heads the Governing Council and is the Secretariat for APPA, a network comprising 19 regulators from around the Asia-Pacific region. The OIPC coordinates the activities of APPA, which meets twice a year to tackle issues of shared interest, including emerging technologies, and the management of privacy enquiries and complaints.

For more, visit: <https://www.appaforum.org/paw>

Media Contact

Michelle Mitchell | Director of Communications
Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for BC
250 217-7872 | mmitchell@oipc.bc.ca
Twitter: @BCInfoPrivacy