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Prison guard accesses inmate's personal information in work database

Checking up on someone's personal details on a workplace computer can be so quick and easy that the occasional employee may forget the importance of privacy protection and the fact that electronic snooping may not go unnoticed. Some public bodies build in the ability to monitor who is accessing what personal data and when into their security procedures. The consequences for snooping can be severe and unpleasant.

A correctional centre told one of its inmates that a guard had accessed his personal information in a work database "for purposes other than work-related use." They told the inmate that they had conducted an investigation and taken steps to ensure it wouldn't happen again. The inmate then complained to us that the correctional centre had failed to protect his personal information.

Section 30 of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FIPPA) requires public bodies to make "reasonable security arrangements" to protect personal information under their custody or control. We discussed that requirement with the senior staff member responsible for the correctional centre's investigation who told us that every access permission to the database in question was recorded, showing the date and time of access and the identity of the person accessing the information. She explained as well that all employees received extensive training about FIPPA's requirements regarding the collection, use and disclosure of personal information and had to sign a document acknowledging they understand those requirements, as outlined in the training process.

The correctional centre's investigation showed that the guard had accessed the inmate's personal information even though he knew that doing so was a breach of FIPPA's requirements. As a result, he had been severely disciplined by his employer. We concluded the public body had reasonable security measures in place and had taken appropriate steps to deal with the incident in question and to make sure all its employees clearly understood the importance of protecting of personal information.