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News Release

NEWS RELEASE
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**B.C. app developers need to do a better job of providing
privacy information to users, says Commissioner**

VICTORIA—Results of the second annual Global Privacy Enforcement Network (GPEN) privacy sweep show that application developers need to do a much better job of providing privacy information to consumers, B.C. Privacy Commissioner Elizabeth Denham said today.

“The aim of the GPEN Internet Sweep is to shine a light on the importance of transparency in privacy practices online,” said Denham. “More and more people are using their smart phones and tablets to access online content and manage their busy lives. We bank online, shop online, we even date online!”

“We thought it would be helpful as regulators to scrutinize mobile apps from a user’s perspective. What personal information do apps say they are collecting? Are the privacy notices accurate and complete? Are mobile apps following privacy laws when they use or share personal data? These are the questions we sought to answer with the sweep.”

From May 12-18 2014, 26 privacy regulators from around the world examined 1,211 mobile apps from sectors including games, health and fitness and the financial sector in order to better understand the extent to which organizations are informing consumers about their privacy practices.

The B.C. Office examined 15 apps for Apple and Android platforms with a focus on the financial sector. The Commissioner’s staff examined consumer expense trackers, budget and debt management, mortgage calculators, receipt scanners, and banking apps from financial institutions popular in B.C.

The sweep results revealed a majority of apps fail to provide information about privacy practices required by B.C.’s privacy law. The *Personal Information Protection Act* requires notice and consent from an individual before collecting, using or sharing personal information. Yet 54% of B.C. surveyed apps did not provide this information to users.

“Demand for mobile technologies and apps are on the rise, but so are privacy concerns. Companies should be responsive to the needs of their customers, but they must also

follow privacy law and tell their customers what personal data they are collecting and why,” said Denham.

App developers must provide clear information to users about how personal information will be collected, used, and disclosed. This information should be available up-front, before an app is downloaded, and should also be included in a fulsome privacy policy posted to the web. Developers should focus on designing functional and privacy-positive apps, which could be a competitive advantage in a marketplace where consumers are increasingly aware of the risks of personal information leakage and data loss.

“The sweep results are also important because they show us how important it is to be app-savvy. We’re not saying don’t download apps – we’re saying be smart about it,” said Denham.

App users can better protect their privacy when using mobile apps by limiting the amount of personal information stored on their mobile device, researching app providers before sharing financial or other personal information, and by carefully vetting app requests for potentially sensitive information that might not be needed for an app’s functionality.

In 2012, the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for B.C., in conjunction with the federal and Alberta offices, produced a guidance document titled [Seizing Opportunity: Good Privacy Practices for Developing Mobile Apps](#) that sets out key privacy considerations for anyone developing mobile apps.

Founded in 2010, GPEN is an informal network of privacy enforcement authorities from around the world. The members aim to work together to strengthen personal privacy protections in a global context. The network is comprised of 51 privacy enforcement authorities in 39 jurisdictions.

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