



OFFICE OF THE
INFORMATION &
PRIVACY COMMISSIONER
for British Columbia

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News Release

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B.C. businesses must improve online privacy practices, says Commissioner

VICTORIA—The results of the first-ever Global Privacy Enforcement Network (GPEN) internet sweep shows that B.C. companies have work to do to make their privacy policies clear and accessible to the public, Commissioner Elizabeth Denham said today.

From May 6-12, GPEN partners assessed more than 2,000 private sector websites to see what companies were telling users about the amount and type of personal information being collected, used and disclosed. The sweep was meant to replicate the consumer experience by spending a few minutes per site checking for performance against a set of common indicators.

For its part, the B.C. office examined more than 250 websites doing business in the province, including charities, private colleges, law firms, credit unions, retailers, property management companies and health care organizations.

Of the B.C. websites surveyed, 45% did not have an online privacy policy, which is more than double the global average of 21%. Where privacy policies existed, many B.C. companies were not providing enough information to users about the type and amount of personal information they collect.

“Many businesses failed to identify what personal information they collect from their customers. Organizations should be clear with consumers about the amount and type of personal information it collects, and for what purpose. This is a legal requirement under the *Personal Information Protection Act*,” said Denham.

Further, many privacy policies surveyed were written in technical or legalistic language, making it difficult for the average user to understand what they were consenting to.

“B.C. businesses should be open and transparent about how they collect, use and disclose personal information, and to provide meaningful information about their personal information practices in clear and plain language. Customers must be able to make informed decisions about how their personal data will be used and to take steps to protect their privacy,” said Denham.

To help companies improve their online privacy practices, the B.C. office has published a new guidance document to help companies write clear, transparent and complete online privacy policies. The document is available at: www.oipc.bc.ca

The global internet sweep is an initiative of the Global Privacy Enforcement Network (GPEN). Founded in 2010, GPEN members enforce privacy laws at the national and sub-national level. Agencies in the following countries and regions have been accepted as members of GPEN: Canada (British Columbia), Australia (Victoria, Queensland), the European Union (Bulgaria, Berlin, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland), Israel, Korea, New Zealand, United Kingdom (Guernsey) and the United States.

The Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for B.C. is an independent office of the Legislature whose mandate is to monitor and enforce the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (public sector) and the *Personal Information Protection Act* (private sector).

Summary of 2013 GPEN internet sweep

	Global results	B.C. results
Total number of websites searched	2,186	254
Number of sites where no privacy policy was found	464 (23%)	114 (45%)
Number of sites where concerns arose about locating the privacy policy on the website	493 (22.5%)	25 (10%)
Number of sites where concerns arose about contact information of privacy policy	419 (19%)	16 (6%)
Number of sites where concerns arose about readability of privacy policy	688 (31.5%)	135 (96%)
Number of sites where concerns arose about relevance of information in privacy policy	620 (28%)	85 (61%)
Total number of sites for which one or more concern was identified	1,091 (50%)	253 (99%)
Average word count of privacy policy	1,659	N/A