



News from around the world

Poland adopts data protection law

Poland adopted a data protection law in August 1997. The law, which applies to both the private and public sectors, and establishes a supervisory authority, enters into force on 30th April 1998. Read more about Poland's law in the next issue of this newsletter.

Sweden educates its youth on privacy

Sweden's Data Protection Authority, Datainspektionen, last year launched an education pack aimed at teenagers. The pack, which is now used in schools, alerts young persons to privacy matters in the information society.

It is only appropriate that a country, which shares with Finland the highest rate of Internet users in the world, is concerned with young persons' understanding of privacy matters. The educational material, comprising a CD-rom disk, a textbook in a pocket format, and a website on the Internet, illuminates the relationship between information technology and privacy in Sweden.

You won't get to me as the pack is titled, has been produced for the young with the help of the young. A series of interviews with high school students and their teachers revealed that teenagers are interested in privacy issues and would like to know their rights in an IT society.

The Swedes' enthusiasm to put together an education pack is easily understood having heard the concerns of Anitha Bondestam, Datainspektionen's Director, expressed forcefully at last year's Data Protection Authorities' Conference in Brussels. "We have ethical dilemmas when two laws are in conflict with each other. Take the example of Katarina, a 16 year old who sees a school doctor for a prescription for contraceptive pills. Theoretically, her parents should be informed as she is a minor but the doctor must respect her medical secrecy."

The pack was produced by Datainspektionen together with Sweden's Central School Authority, and partly financed by a government-linked foundation for the promotion of information technology.

More information is available in Swedish at <http://www.din.se/youwont.html>

Canadian Internet Service Providers adopt a Code of Conduct on privacy

CAIP, the Canadian Association of Internet Providers, has adopted a voluntary Code of Conduct. Apart from a commitment to comply with all applicable laws, the Code requires CAIP members to protect the privacy of the users. CAIP members are encouraged to introduce internal procedures to protect personal privacy, and pay special attention to sensitive data. Those who will adopt the Code are to ensure that they will not knowingly host illegal content. A reasonable effort has to be made to investigate complaints about alleged illegal content, and take appropriate action.

The Code represents the kind of self-regulation that is favoured by the industry. Whether CAIP members will adopt codes and model contracts to give effect to the Code of Conduct, remains to be seen. Guidance on how to protect individuals' privacy already exists, namely The Model Code for the Protection of Personal Information of the Canadian Standards Association (PL&B Sept. '96 pp. 8-10).

The CAIP Code and commentary are available on the Internet at <http://www.caip.ca/caipcode.htm>

EPIC criticises Internet content filters

EPIC, a US-based research centre on privacy matters, has claimed that Internet content filters form a threat to the Internet as an educational resource (PL&B Oct. '97 p.28 and PL&B Dec. '97 pp. 13-15). In its report, published on 1st December 1997, EPIC says that "family friendly" search engines typically block access to 99% of the material that would be suitable for youngsters. EPIC tested an unfiltered search engine (AltaVista) and a filtered engine. The results were obtained using search words such as "American Red Cross" or "Thomas Edison." EPIC announced that it would join twenty other organisations to establish the Internet Free Expression Alliance (IFEA). The coalition will promote open exchange of information on the Net.

The Electronic Privacy Information Centre (EPIC) is based in Washington DC, USA. Its website is at: <http://www.epic.org>
The report, *Faulty Filters*, is available at: http://www.epic.org/reports/filter_report.html



Electronic Robinson lists now available

Electronic Robinson lists are now available on the Internet, sponsored by a German Internet provider, Alpenland. The service, which is free of charge, enables Internet users to register in order to avoid receiving unsolicited advertising. The lists can be bought, but only for the right purpose. For those misusing the lists for advertising there is a fine of at least DM 10,000.

More information is available in German on the Internet at <http://www.eRobinson.com>

New address for Finland's Ombudsman

The Office of Finland's Data Protection Ombudsman has moved to Albertinkatu 25,3.krs, PL 315, 00181 Helsinki, Finland Tel: + 358 9 18251 Fax: + 358 9 18257 835 Home page: www.tietosuoja.fi (PL&B Oct. '97 p.16).

Spain's Internet addresses change

The Spanish Data Protection agency has a new e-mail and home page address: consultas@ag-protecciondatos.es and <http://www.ag-protecciondatos.es>

UK broadcasters adopt code on privacy

The UK Broadcasting Standards Commission has, as part of the revision of its Code of Practice, adopted a *Code on Fairness and Privacy* which became effective at the beginning of this year. Importantly, the Code states that an infringement of privacy can occur during obtaining of material for a programme, even if none is broadcast.

The Code also addresses the issue of material recorded by CCTV cameras. Unless there is an overriding public interest, individual consent should be sought before using material recorded in sensitive situations in places like hospitals and prisons. On the question of privacy for people in the public eye, the Broadcasting Standards Commission recommends that they should be treated differently from the general public only when their private behaviour has wider implications. However, an individual's home address should not be revealed in public.

The Code is available from the Broadcast Standards Commission, 7, The Sanctuary, London, SW1P 3JS. Tel: 0171 233 0544.

EU seeks comments on future regulation of new communications services

The European Commission issued a Green Paper on December 3rd 1997 on the convergence of the telecommunications, media and information technology sectors, and the implications for regulation (PL&B Dec '97 pp. 2-3).

The Commission looks at the developments that allow traditional and new communication services to be provided over many different networks. Sending e-mails over mobile phone networks, or on-line services combined with television are examples of the wide range of new services that are emerging. The Commission points out that while there is regulation for the existing separate sectors, it may not be appropriate for the emerging services. Different levels of data protection and privacy across sectors is identified as one of the factors that may hold back the development of the new services.

In order to minimise risks for consumers, such as loss of privacy, adequate regulatory instruments need to be created. However, on the whole the Commission proposes that convergence should not lead to additional regulation, but existing rules should be reviewed.

Responses to the Green Paper COM(97)623, need to be submitted by 3rd May 1998. The paper is available on the Internet at <http://www.ispo.cec.be>

Québec reports on the last five years

The Québec Data Protection and Information Commission has released a report on *Privacy and Openness in the Administration at the End of the 20th Century*. Since the Commission's five year report in 1992, Québec has adopted a Civil Code and the *Act Respecting the Protection of Personal Information in the Private Sector*.

The Commission believes that it is not necessary to make major amendments to current laws as a result of introducing new information technology. It recommends that companies should first assess the privacy impact before adopting new information systems.

The report is available from the Commission d'accès à l'information du Québec, 900, boulevard René-Lévesque Est, Bureau 315, Québec G1R 2B5, Canada. .