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in this issue

Editorial

This edition of the International Newsletter highlights a welter of new data protection laws – in Canada (p.3), Japan (p.8), Australia (p.10) and Latvia (p.20). Increasingly, governments are prepared to enact fair information practices to protect the personal data of their citizens. However, these laws cannot work without the cooperation of the organisations they regulate. Data protection laws are necessary, but not sufficient. The new laws have been designed to involve the regulated organisations themselves in fostering adequate data protection practices. For example, the Australian legislation permits organisations to enforce their own codes, which in turn must be based on the ten National Privacy Principles. The Royal Bank of Canada offers an example of a financial sector organisation that is complementing Canada's new data protection legislation with its own internal measures.

On a very different plane, two stories in this edition underline the value of data protection in democratic societies. One – the FBI's "Carnivore" Internet surveillance technology (p.19) – deals with allowing the police to cast the net too widely when seeking personal information. The other – a leak of information about organised crime investigators to the Hells Angels in Quebec (p.22) – deals with processes that allow important personal data to fall into the hands of organised criminals.

Lax data protection practices can threaten democratic values and institutions. Both stories remind us that protecting personal data is not just a matter of preventing embarrassment for the individuals whose personal data are obtained improperly. It may be a matter of preserving their democratic rights and their own physical security.

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