



Information Commissioner's Office
Promoting public access to official information
and protecting your personal information

Press Release

Tuesday 15 July 2008

A communications database would be 'a step too far'

Any government run database holding the telephone and internet communications of the entire population would raise serious data protection concerns, the Information Commissioner, Richard Thomas, is warning today. Commenting on speculation that the government is considering the development of such a database Richard Thomas will say that it would be 'a step too far for the British way of life'.

Speaking at the launch of his [annual report](#), Richard Thomas will say: "I am absolutely clear that the targeted, and duly authorised, interception of the communications of suspects can be invaluable in the fight against terrorism and other serious crime. But there needs to be the fullest public debate about the justification for, and implications of, a specially-created database – potentially accessible to a wide range of law enforcement authorities – holding details of everyone's telephone and internet communications. Do we really want the police, security services and other organs of the state to have access to more and more aspects of our private lives?"

"Speculation that the Home Office is considering collecting this information from phone companies and internet service providers has been reinforced by the government's Draft Legislative Programme which, referring to a proposed Communications Data Bill, talks about 'modifying procedures for acquiring communications data'."

Richard Thomas believes that there has not been sufficient parliamentary or public debate on proposals to collect more and more personal information without proper justification, citing the expansion of the DNA database and the centralised collection

and retention of data from Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras as two recent examples.

Richard Thomas says: “We welcomed last month’s report from the all-party Home Affairs Committee warning of the dangers of excessive surveillance. I entirely agree that before major new databases are launched careful consideration must be given to the impact on individuals’ liberties and on society as a whole. Sadly, there have been too many developments where there has not been sufficient openness, transparency or public debate.”

The Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) is today serving [enforcement notices](#) against HMRC and MoD following recent high profile data breaches. The notices require both departments to provide progress reports documenting in detail how the recommendations have been, or are being, implemented to improve Data Protection compliance. Failure to comply with an Enforcement Notice is a criminal offence.

The Information Commissioner’s annual report highlights that the ICO received 24,851 enquiries and complaints concerning personal information in 2007/8. The ICO has prosecuted 11 individuals and organisations in the last 12 months.

The ICO received 2,646 freedom of information complaints over the last year and closed 2,658. Three hundred and ninety-five formal Decision Notices were issued and of these, 30% ruled in favour of the complainant while 25% upheld public authorities’ original decisions. In 45% of cases the ICO upheld some elements of the complaint in favour of the complainant and agreed with the public authority on others.

ENDS

If you need more information, please contact the ICO press office on 020 7025 7580 or visit the website at: www.ico.gov.uk

Notes to Editors

1. The Information Commissioner promotes public access to official information and protects personal information. The ICO is an independent body with specific responsibilities set out in the Data Protection Act 1998, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Environmental Information Regulations 2004 and Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003.
2. For more information about the Information Commissioner's Office subscribe to our e-newsletter at www.ico.gov.uk
3. For a copy of the Information Commissioner's annual report or extracts from the Information Commissioner's speech please go to www.ico.gov.uk
4. Anyone who processes personal information must comply with eight principles, which make sure that personal information is:
 - Fairly and lawfully processed
 - Processed for limited purposes
 - Adequate, relevant and not excessive
 - Accurate and up to date
 - Not kept for longer than is necessary
 - Processed in line with your rights
 - Secure
 - Not transferred to other countries without adequate protection