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B.C. loses hard drive with millions of people's info

TECHNOLOGY

Device contains education records from 1986 to 2009



Matt Kieltyka
Metro | Vancouver

The British Columbia government has lost a hard drive that contains the personal information of 3.4 million people.

Amrik Virk, Minister of Tech-

nology, Innovation and Citizens' Services, announced the data breach publicly Tuesday and also launched a review across all ministries' data storage and privacy practices.

"There is no doubt that a mistake was made, first in how the hard drive was created and secondly in how it was stored," said Virk. "The bottom line is that this should not have happened."

Virk said the unencrypted external hard drive was improperly created as a back-up and put into storage, but it could not be found after an extensive search

last week.

The minister claims the drive has not been accessed by anyone and could have been destroyed or stored elsewhere.

The risk to individuals is low, Virk said.

The hard drive doesn't contain any financial, banking, social insurance or drivers licence data.

But it does contain the education records for 3.4 million British Columbia and Yukon residents from 1986 to 2009, including personal education numbers, full names, postal codes, and the home addresses

+ PHONE LINE

The government has set up a Service BC info line (1-800-663-7867) for people who want to find out if any of their personal information was contained on the drive.

of Grade 12 students.

The drive also contains smaller subsets of more sensitive data, including case file and health information of thousands of students in Ministry of

Children and Family Development care, teachers' employment data, and a 2008 file containing information of 1,052 post-secondary cancer survivors involved in a research trial.

The breach has sparked a government-wide review into the management of personal information, starting with the Ministry of Education, Virk said.

Both the opposition NDP and BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF) released statements scolding the government.

The NDP called it the "biggest loss of privacy data in B.C. history" and citizen services critic

Doug Routley questioned what other sensitive records are unprotected and warehoused by the government.

BCTF president Jim Iker said the union has had "huge concerns" for years about the amount of student and teacher data collected by the Ministry of Education.

"Why is a 35-year-old today worried about her or his privacy being violated from student records collected 25 years ago," Iker said in a statement. "I hope now the government will take our concerns and student privacy seriously."