



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

Press Release

Amended 23/04/08

Roll call of data breaches grows

The Information Commissioner, Richard Thomas, is today reminding chief executives of the vital importance of protecting staff and customers' personal information following an alarming number of security breaches reported to his Office in the past six months.

Since the security breach at HM Revenue and Customs in November last year, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has been notified of almost 100 data breaches by public, private and third sector organisations. Of the security breaches that the ICO has been made aware of by private sector organisations, 50% were reported by financial institutions. Of those reported almost a third occurred in central government and associated agencies and a fifth in NHS organisations.

Richard Thomas, Information Commissioner, said: "It is particularly disappointing that the HMRC breaches have not prevented other unacceptable security breaches from occurring. The government, banks and other organisations need to regain the public's trust by being far more careful with people's personal information. Once again I urge business and public sector leaders to make data protection a priority in their organisation. The level of understanding about data protection and the need to safeguard people's personal information have no doubt increased and I am encouraged that more Chief Executives and Permanent Secretaries appear to be taking data protection more seriously, but the evidence shows that more must be done to eradicate inexcusable security breaches."

Information that has gone missing includes unencrypted laptops and computer discs, memory sticks and paper records. Information has been stolen, gone missing in the post and whilst in transit with a courier. The material includes a wide range of personal details, including financial and health records.

The ICO is investigating the circumstances of the breaches. In 16 cases the ICO has required the organisation to make procedural changes to improve data security, such as encryption. In three instances the lost information has been recovered.

The ICO encourages organisations to report data breaches and can advise on dealing with breaches and notifying affected customers. The ICO has recently published new guidance for organisations on how to deal with security breaches. A copy of the ICO's *Guidance on data security breach management* can be downloaded from www.ico.gov.uk

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If you need more information, please contact the Information Commissioner's 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. A sector breakdown of the security breaches reported to the ICO is as follows:
 - Public sector 61 breaches (66%)
 - Private sector 28 breaches (30%)
 - Third sector 4 breaches (4%)
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