



The Office of the Information Commissioner of Canada

What is the role of the Information Commissioner of Canada?

The Information Commissioner of Canada:

- Helps to ensure that Canada's freedom of information law is respected;
- Defends the rights of those making information requests by investigating complaints of requestors who believe federal institutions have not respected their rights under the *Access to Information Act*;
- Encourages federal institutions to make information more easily available to the public to keep the federal government accountable to Canadians; and
- Promotes awareness of the importance of open and transparent government.

The Commissioner is independent of government and is answerable to Parliament.

What is Canada's freedom of information law?

It is the *Access to Information Act*. It gives any Canadian citizen, resident or company the right to request and receive information that federal institutions have. This could include: documents, pictures, letters, emails and memos.

You should be aware that there are some limitations to the information that federal institutions are required to make public. Information such as: Cabinet documents, information that could harm Canada's security or economy, federal-provincial relations or international affairs. Much of the personal information about individuals that the federal institutions collect is not available.

The law has been in effect since July 1, 1983, and most government institutions, including Crown corporations, are required to follow it.

How can this benefit me?

The *Access to Information Act* is one of the many tools the public has to hold the government accountable. Even if you never make a request for information you benefit from this law. When journalists and other groups make information requests while investigating federal institutions' activities, they help bring to light activities that may otherwise have been kept secret.

How do I get information from a federal institution?

A lot of information is already available on websites or in publications. You might be able to find the information you are looking for there. If not, you may make a request in writing under the *Access to Information Act*.

The federal institution has to answer your request within 30 days or tell you why it will take longer. You can learn more about how to make a request at the Treasury Board Secretariat of Canada website (<http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/tbsf-fsct/350-57-eng.asp>).

What if I am not satisfied with the answer I received?

This is where the Office of the Information Commissioner can get involved. You can complain to the Office within 60 days of receiving your answer from the federal institution for reasons such as:

- You believe you were improperly denied the information you requested;
- The answer to your request is taking too long;
- The fees are too high; or,
- You have not received the information in your official language of choice.

What happens next?

The Office of the Information Commissioner will inform you that it received your complaint and will assess it. Many complaints are settled quickly and easily by clearing up misinterpretations or errors. Otherwise, the Office will investigate and attempt to resolve your complaint as soon as possible and will report back to you.

What if I am still not satisfied?

If you are not satisfied with the findings of the Office, you may apply to the Federal Court of Canada for a review of the federal institution's decision to deny you access to the information you asked for.

How do I contact the Information Commissioner?

Write to:

Office of the Information Commissioner of Canada
112 Kent Street, 7th Floor
Ottawa, ON K1A 1H3

Contact us:

Tel.: 613-995-2410
Toll-free: 1-800-267-0441
TTY: 613-947-0388 (collect)
Fax: 613-947-7294

For general enquiries e-mail:
general@infocom.gc.ca

For more information, consult our website:
www.infocom.gc.ca

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