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PRIVACY REMAINS VULNERABLE, COMMISSIONER WARNS IN ANNUAL REPORT

Victoria—Law enforcement efforts to fight terrorism and cyber-crime continue to pose serious challenges to the privacy rights of citizens, Information and Privacy Commissioner David Loukidelis states in his Annual Report, released this week.

The United States anti-terrorist legislation known as the *USA Patriot Act* generated controversy when concerns were expressed that this law would allow American law enforcement agencies to gain access to the personal information of British Columbians here in British Columbia. In response, the Commissioner announced his intention to examine this issue through a public process involving privacy experts, stakeholders and the public. “I take this issue very, very seriously,” he stated, “and will work hard to publish an advisory report this summer offering practical, effective recommendations on how to deal with any privacy risks.”

The Commissioner also opposes the federal governments proposal to lower the bar for obtaining search warrants to monitor Internet use and email communications. “No evidence has been presented that the existing legal standards for obtaining search warrants were harming law enforcement efforts in light of new technologies or criminal methods,” he stated.

On another front, privacy laws were extended on January 1, 2004 to the private sector. The *Personal Information Protection Act* governs the collection, use and disclosure of personal information by over 350,000 businesses, trade unions, charities and other non-profit associations. In the first three months of the year, the OIPC opened 22 complaints and fielded hundreds of telephone calls and written inquiries from businesses and the public concerning private sector privacy. The most common sectors the OIPC received questions about concerned employers and unions; insurance companies and credit unions; landlord and tenants, health care professions and lawyers.

The Annual Report 2003/2004 of the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner can be found at www.oipc.bc.ca.

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