

NEWS RELEASE

January 2, 2013

Pledge to Protect Your Online Privacy in 2013: Five New Year's Resolutions

Commissioner Cavoukian urges everyone to stay diligent in protecting themselves online with five easy resolutions

TORONTO, January 2, 2013 – As we spend more and more time online, people need to be diligent in protecting their online privacy and personal information to avoid identity theft and fraud. Over this past holiday season, many Ontarians received or purchased new smartphones and tablets; consequently, many have spent a significant amount of time adding new applications, but too few have taken the time to consider the privacy risks.

“Through web browsing, posting on social networks, and the downloading of applications, personal information about individuals can be easily collected and stored indefinitely, making protecting our online privacy a growing concern,” said Dr. Ann Cavoukian, Ontario’s Information and Privacy Commissioner. “I encourage everyone to make a commitment to protecting themselves by incorporating these five resolutions into their online habits.”

Commissioner Cavoukian recommends these five simple New Year’s resolutions:

1. *I will review my social network privacy settings regularly.*

Always understand what you are sharing online and who can see it. Take the time to carefully review the privacy settings for each social network and application you are using. For example, it has become quite common for many applications to add time and geo-location data to photos, thereby allowing anyone to track your location. Remember – these settings can change at any time without your consent, so the onus is on you, the user, to be aware.

2. *I will think before I click!*

Once you post online, it is very difficult to erase. Numerous new companies have appeared with the sole intent of “cleaning up” online histories. This is completely unnecessary if you proactively consider what you are posting online. Consider what a future employer or a scholarship funder might think of a post. Carefully evaluate what an identity thief might be able to do with the information you are sharing.

3. *I will always consider the five W’s of personal information.*

Whether you are purchasing a product online or joining a new social network, minimize the amount of personal information you give out. Always evaluate if the website or application really needs so much information to provide you with a service. When divulging information, think about the following five W’s: **Who** wants it and who will have access to it? **Why** do they want it? **What**

will it be used for? **Where** will your information be stored? **When** will your information be used and when will it be discarded?

4. *I will make my passwords unique.*

With numerous programs circulating to break passwords, it is important to keep them difficult to decrypt, but also easy to remember. One straight-forward solution is to use the same word in two languages (i.e. home and maison). To make it even more difficult to break, use the phonetic spelling of one of the words. The addition of numbers, symbols, and capital letters will also help to ensure strong protection (i.e. Home7Mayzon\$).

5. *I will carefully read the fine print.*

It is imperative that you understand the terms and conditions of any application or program before clicking agree. Buried within this information can be permissions for companies to share your personal information and online habits without your knowledge. (We know this is a tough one – we're asking for a lot!)

About the IPC

The Information and Privacy Commissioner is appointed by, and reports to, the Ontario Legislative Assembly, and is independent of the government of the day. The Commissioner's mandate includes overseeing the access and privacy provisions of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, as well as the *Personal Health Information Protection Act*, which applies to both public and private sector health information custodians. The Commissioner's mandate also includes helping to educate the public about access and privacy issues.

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