

October 3, 2015
Airdrie, Alberta

Michael Ferguson, Auditor General
Office of the Auditor General of Canada
240 Sparks Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0G6

Dear Mr. Ferguson:

RE: YOUR OFFICE'S RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE RCMP'S FIP DATABASE

In December of 2002, your predecessor tabled her report in Parliament that included a section under Chapter 11—Other Audit Observations titled: *RCMP—Canadian Firearms Program: Information to screen applicants for firearms licences may not be accurate* (Copy attached for easy reference).

Considering that in 2002 the RCMP operated "***a database of about four million records called the Firearms Interest Police***" and also that it must be much bigger today, I would be very interested in getting an update advising us if the issues identified have been resolved and if your recommendation for 'remedial action' has been implemented and whether it has been effective. Of particular concern to me from your 2002 report are these two points: (1) '*persons are known to be in the database who should not be,*' and (2) '*some persons who should be in the database are not.*' A reply I received from an RCMP ATIP officer would seem to indicate problems still exist: "***I agree with you on this Dennis. Erroneous flags can be very harmful to law abiding people. To my knowledge there is no avenue to correct them which should be addressed at some level.***"

The problem for me is that the RCMP advises that they are not able to tell me if my name appears in their database. The RCMP response to my Personal Information request stated: "***Unfortunately, the RCMP does not have an [sic] FIP database, therefore we were unable to locate records which respond to your request.***"

At least one official in the Privacy Commissioner's Office now contradicts the Privacy Commissioner's 2001 report and 2003 letter and agrees with the RCMP. His e-mail response to my complaint to the Privacy Commissioner stated: "***As a Firearms Interest Police (FIP) database does not exist, the RCMP was unable to locate records responsive to your request.***"

All my supporting documentation and background information is available at this link:
<http://dennisryoung.ca/2015/10/03/privacy-commissioner-tries-to-kill-my-complaints-about-access-to-fip-database-october-2-2015/>

Odd isn't it, that the Library of Parliament, the RCMP, the Privacy Commissioner and the Auditor General were all referring to the FIP as 'database' in 1999, 2001, 2002 and 2004 but now it's no longer a 'database'?

Odder still the official in the Privacy Commissioner's Office had this piece of confusing advice for me: ***"With regard to the potential misuse and inaccurate information in FIP entries under the control of the RCMP, our Office would require evidence to substantiate such allegations before proceeding with an in-depth review. If you could provide us with documented examples, we would be pleased to investigate the matter on your behalf."***

How am I supposed to find 'documented examples' of 'potential misuse and inaccurate information' if I can't even find out if my own name has ever been the subject of an 'FIP event' over the last fifteen years?

Thanks for your help.

Sincerely,

[Original signed by]

Dennis R. Young
1330 Ravenswood Drive SE
Airdrie, Alberta T4A 0P8
Phone: 587-360-1111
E-Mail: dennisyoung@telus.net
Website: www.dennisyoung.ca

cc The Privacy Commissioner of Canada
The Information Commissioner of Canada
The Honourable Tony Clement, President of the Treasury Board
The Honourable Steven Blaney, Minister of Public Safety

2002 December Report of the Auditor General of Canada
Chapter 11—Other Audit Observations
Royal Canadian Mounted Police—Canadian Firearms Program
Information to screen applicants for firearms licences may not be accurate
http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_200212_11_e_12405.html#ch11hd3c

In brief

As part of the Department of Justice's Canadian Firearms Program, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) **operates a database of about four million records called the Firearms Interest Police**. Chief Firearms Officers use this database to help screen applicants for firearms licences. The RCMP provides about 1 million of these records. The RCMP told us that while it believes that the database has significantly improved public safety, it remains concerned about the reliability of the information it provides to the database. This matter came to our attention as part of our follow-up to our study of challenges to the criminal justice system, reported to Parliament in our April 2002 Report, Chapter 4.

Background

11.28 The Department of Justice's Canadian Firearms Program requires that the Chief Firearms Officers screen applicants for firearms licences in order to help ensure public safety. The Officers use the Firearms Interest Police database to help screen applicants.

11.29 The RCMP indicates that over 900 police agencies contribute information to the database. It contains information on individuals who have had contact with the police, including those that have been charged with an offence. The RCMP provides about 1 million of the records in the database. These records are extracted from the RCMP's Police Information Retrieval System database. The RCMP reviewed the quality of the records it provides. The data supplied by other police agencies were not reviewed.

Issues

11.30 In November 1998 and March 2000, the Senior Executive Committee of the RCMP was informed that officers responsible for the RCMP's contributions to the Firearms Interest Police database had serious concerns about the accuracy and completeness of the information. We reviewed RCMP files and made other inquiries to confirm the significance of these concerns.

11.31 An April 2001 RCMP review of data quality stated that

- persons are known to be in the database who should not be, and thus could be denied firearms licences or have their eligibility reviewed; and
- some persons who should be in the database are not and these individuals could be issued licences and subsequently use firearms to commit a violent offence.

The review concluded that a tragic incident could arise as a consequence of the poor data quality and that the RCMP therefore faces serious legal risks.

11.32 In 2002, the RCMP further indicated that the quality of the data was still questionable.

Conclusion and recommendation

11.33 The RCMP's concerns about the data are based on the limited reviews it has conducted. If what these RCMP reviews show is representative of the risks that the database presents, then remedial action must be taken immediately. However, to be effective, such action must be based on an urgent systematic identification of the problems in the database and potential solutions.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police's response. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) is aware of the concerns about the quality of some data in its Police Information Retrieval System and its impact on the Canadian Firearms Program. The RCMP considers public safety to be paramount. For this reason, the RCMP is committed to ensuring that individuals who do not meet the legal requirements to be issued a firearms licence are identified through proper information sharing.

The RCMP recognizes that effective information sharing for the purposes of the Canadian Firearms Program is critical, and that this is dependent on the integrity of the data contained in

police information systems, including those of the RCMP. The RCMP has implemented a number of remedial measures to address data quality issues. These include a record disclosure and verification process, system-level error detection and reporting mechanisms, enhanced system user awareness regarding data quality issues, development of additional data quality reviewer expertise, progress and compliance monitoring, and an increased level of accountability on the part of contributors to RCMP systems for their data quality.

The RCMP opens 2.9 million operational case records per year, from over 750 locations throughout Canada. The measures specified to address data quality in the RCMP's Police Information Retrieval System are already proving to be effective.

Audit team

Assistant Auditor General: Hugh McRoberts

Principal: Alan Gilmore

Director: Ted Bonder