



27 July 2005

Warning to businesses and charities about data protection scam

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) is today warning businesses and voluntary organisations in Northern Ireland not to be misled by bogus agencies that send notices demanding money to register under the Data Protection Act 1998.

Organisations in Northern Ireland are being specifically targeted by fake data protection agencies posing as official government bodies. The letters, which request sums of up to £135 to register under the Data Protection Act, often use threatening language and are on official-looking headed notepaper.

The statutory fee for notification is just £35 a year. Organisations and businesses that need to register should go directly to the ICO.

Assistant Information Commissioner for Northern Ireland, Marie Anderson, said:

“Do not fall victim to these data protection fake agencies. The golden rule is that if a business receives a letter out of the blue demanding more than £35 to register under the Data Protection Act this will be a scam. Our simple message to businesses is to throw the letter in the bin and not to pay the fee.

“If businesses are in any doubt about a letter they receive they can contact the ICO directly to establish if they are required to notify.”

The unscrupulous activity of bogus data protection agencies received a severe blow in December 2004 as two men were sentenced to a total of six and a half years at Burnley Crown Court after they pleaded guilty to conning businesses across the UK out of nearly £700,000.

If businesses are in any doubt about a letter they have received they can:

- call the Belfast office on 028 9051 1270
- go to the notification section at www.ico.gov.uk or
- call the ICO notification line on 01625 545 740

If you are unsure as to whether you are required to register your business under the Data Protection Act, you can find out the relevant criteria from the ICO and notify directly.

ENDS

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 and other legislation.
2. Most companies that hold personal data are required to notify their company with the Information Commissioner's Office under the Data Protection Act. However, certain exemptions exist for companies that only process personal data for staff administration, accounts, advertising, marketing and public relations. The Information Commissioner is required to maintain a public register of those who have notified under the Data Protection Act.
3. Most businesses notify directly with the ICO without the help of intermediaries.
4. Local Trading Standards and the Office of Fair Trading are well aware of the activities of bogus agencies. Recent action has been taken against similar "agencies", and investigations are on-going.
5. The Office of Fair Trading has received complaints regarding the following organisations which they are considering:
 - Data Protection Enforcement Agency (Data Protection Registration Service)
 - Data Protection Agency Registration Services Ltd
 - Data Protection Agency Services (Warrington)
 - Data Protection Agency Services (Hyde)
 - Crown Data Collection Enforcement Data Protection Bureau
 - Data Protection Registration Agency (Liverpool)
 - Data Protection Registration Agency (Cheshire)
 - Data Protection Agency Services (Blackpool)
 - Data Protection Agency Services (London)
 - Data Protection Agency Services (Fleetwood)
 - Data Protection Agency Services (Liverpool)
 - Data Protection Processing Corporation
 - Data Protection Agency Services (Crew)
 - Data Protection Enforcement Agency (Manchester)
 - Data Protection Agency Services (Stoke-on-Trent)
 - Data Registration (Renewals)
 - DPAS (Renewals)
 - Data Protection Agency Services, DPA Enforcement Section
 - Data Protection Commissioner Services
 - Data Protection Enforcement Agency (Rochdale)
 - Data Protection Enforcement Agency (St Helens)
 - Data Protection Registration Department (D.P.R.D)
 - Data Protection Registration Agency (Cheltham)
 - Data Processing Protection Corporation

- The Department of Company Registration
 - Data Protection Agency Registration Services
6. There is no connection between the Information Commissioner and any of these self styled “agencies”.
 7. Information about the Information Commissioner's Office is available on the main website: www.ico.gov.uk
 8. For further media information contact, Helen Ketton, Katharine Courts, Janet Rafferty or James Ford on 020 7282 2960.