Tip of the Month – April, 2013

<u>Faxing personal information</u>

Although using the "EMAIL" is becoming more widespread in recent times, many individuals (and organizations) continue to use the "FAX" to send personal and business information as a means of direct communication. Faxing personal information may increase the risk that highly sensitive details will fall into the hands of people who should not receive them. Below are some questions and helpful hints you should consider relevant to using the fax.

What are the risks?

Dialing a wrong fax number could accidentally send sensitive personal information, welfare files, unemployment claims, criminal records or medical diagnoses, to the wrong person. On several occasions employees have misdialed numbers or hit the wrong speed-dial key and send sensitive personal information to the media.

Locating a fax machine out in the open means personal information being sent or received may be visible to passers-by.

Fax transmissions, like telephone calls, can be tapped and monitored. If you must fax personal information, consider buying a machine which encrypts transmissions.

How can I reduce the risk?

- Fax only personal information that must be transmitted immediately. Send other urgent information by hand.

- Always confirm that the receiver has taken appropriate precautions to prevent anyone else from seeing the faxed documents.

- Before sending a fax, check that the receiver's number is correct, then verify in the machine's display window that you have keyed it in correctly.

- If you must send personal information, always complete the fax cover sheet, clearly identifying both sender and intended receiver. The cover sheet should include a warning that the information is intended for the named recipient only, as well as a request to contact you if the transmission was misdirected.

- Call the recipient to verify that he or she received the complete transaction.

- Any fax machine used to send or receive personal information should be kept is a closed area to prevent unauthorized persons from seeing the documents.

- Consider making one individual responsible for the fax machine. Otherwise, limit the chances that passers-by can see personal documents by sending the documents yourself. Arrange a time to receive faxes containing personal information so you can be at the machine as they arrive.

- Fax only the personal information which you would feel comfortable discussing over the telephone.

- If your fax machine is equipped, use the feature requiring the receiver to enter a password before the machine will print the fax. This ensures that only the intended receiver can retrieve the document. Similarly, ask the sender to make sure that you must supply a password to retrieve the document.

- If you are sending personal information by a fax modem (a fax device contained in a computer), confirm that other users of the computer system cannot get access to the fax without a password.

- Likewise, if you are expecting information by fax modem, ensure that other users of your system cannot access the information without a password.

What should I do if someone asks me to fax his or her own personal information?

- Explain how faxing personal information can result in it being accidentally disclosed or deliberately intercepted by other people.

- Explain the risk and the precautions you have taken to reduce the risks. Ensure the person consented before you fax personal information.

For more information on this and any other data protection concern you may have, please email us at dataprotection@bahamas.gov.bs or visit our website www.bahamas.gov.bs/dataprotection.

Remember "Privacy is the Best Policy"

(Adapted, courtesy of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada).