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Council of Europe Data Protection Day 28 January 2014: Results of Data Protection Public Awareness Survey released

Ahead of Data Protection Day tomorrow, Tuesday 28 January 2014, the Data Protection Commissioner, Billy Hawkes has published the results of a Data Protection Public Awareness Survey carried out during May 2013 by Millward Brown on behalf of his Office. The results of the survey are being published to mark the 8th Council of Europe Data Protection Day, 28th January 2014. The 28th January is the anniversary of the opening for signature of the Council of Europe's 1981 Data Protection Convention (Ireland signed the Convention in 1986). This is the eighth year that countries across Europe and indeed beyond have marked the day by increasing awareness of data protection and privacy rights.

Results of Awareness Survey 2013 (<http://www.dataprotection.ie/docs/Public-Awareness-Surveys/1287.htm>)

A key finding from the survey of 1,000 respondents aged 18+ was that awareness of the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner continues to increase, with 65% of the respondents affirming they had heard of the Data Protection Commissioner. This compares with 25% when the first awareness survey commenced in 1997 and is an increase from the 58% recorded in 2008.

One striking finding from the survey was that although the majority of people surveyed continue to have concerns about privacy in relation to internet use, there are indications that people are more accepting of the potential availability of their personal information online. Levels of concern dropped from that displayed by respondents in 2008. For example, concerns regarding privacy settings on social networking sites fell from 61% in 2008 to 49% in 2013 and concerns regarding the information that might appear if someone entered their name into a search engine fell from 65% to 44%. We also noted that concerns regarding internet usage logs being retained or monitored fell from 63% to 47%.

Similar to 2008, over two thirds of those surveyed believed they have personally experienced an invasion of privacy on some level. The most notable increases relate to receiving unsolicited email and text messages with 45% of respondents stating they had received unsolicited emails in comparison to 28% in 2008 and 41% unsolicited text messages (35% in 2008).

On the medical front, the survey results reveal strong opposition to the release of medical records for health research purposes without the permission of the patient. Announcing the survey results, the Data Protection Commissioner, Billy Hawkes, stated

"the continued increase in awareness of my Office is to be welcomed. The survey results again demonstrate that Irish citizens continue to have legitimate concerns about privacy in relation to internet use. In relation to indications that people have become more accepting of the potential availability of their personal information online, the experience of this Office is that vigilance should be maintained at all times

by individuals when posting personal information online particularly where that information is available for public viewing. Regarding the increase in unsolicited electronic communications reported by respondents, we continue to devote considerable attention to this area and to prosecute offenders who breach regulations regarding unsolicited electronic communications."

Ends

Further Information:

The questionnaire was included in a Millward Brown omnibus survey in May 2013 where a sample of 1,000 respondents aged 18+ were interviewed. The survey's key findings and the full report are available on the Commissioner's website –

<http://www.dataprotection.ie/docs/Public-Awareness-Surveys/1287.htm>

Similar research was conducted by this Office in 2008, 2005, 2002 and 1997.

More information on Council of Europe Data Protection Day can be found at:

http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/dataprotection/Data_protection_day_en.asp