

HRSDC privacy breach letters sent to wrong people

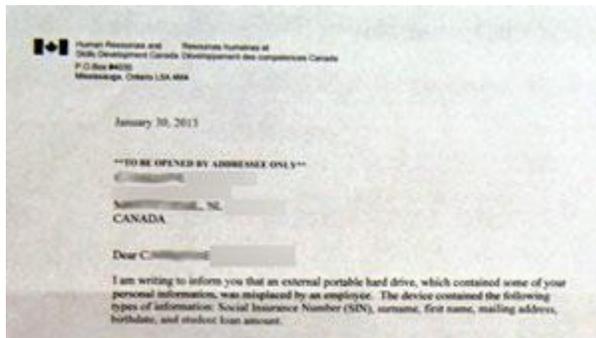
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Former student loan recipients say letters from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada informing them their personal information may have been lost also include the contact information of complete strangers.

The federal government is mailing many student loan borrowers to tell them about the loss of a hard drive from a government office in Gatineau, Que., in November.

According to some notice recipients, the envelopes with their notices also held letters for strangers.



Chris Elliott said a letter addressed to a woman in Newfoundland was sent to his address. (Supplied by Chris Elliott)

Chris Elliott from Halifax received his letter this week. He said it also contained a letter addressed to a woman he did not know.

"I took a look at [my envelope] when I got home . . . noticed that the first one was the French-language one, so I took a look at the other one assuming it would be the English-language one and that had a completely different person's contact information on it," said Elliott.

The letters include the name and mailing address of recipients, but not other personal information such as a social insurance number. The single sheet of paper begins with an all-capitalized message warning: "to be opened by addressee only."

Elliott said a colleague at his workplace also had the same double-letter mix-up.

"They can't even keep the basic mail outs together? This tells me there is something seriously dysfunctional in that department," said Elliott.

HRSDC spokeswoman Alyson Queen said in an email Friday morning that a small batch of less than 100 letters "may have been stuffed into the incorrect envelopes due to a printer error."

"The letters did not include social insurance numbers. The department has sent a return mail envelope to those clients in question," wrote Queen.

Calls for MPs to take breach seriously

Mark Fillier, a former loan recipient who set up a website to advocate for people who had their information lost, said he has heard from three individuals who have also claimed to have received multiple letters.

He said his group plans to mail out letters Friday to all 308 members of Parliament, calling on them to take the breach seriously, and for HRSDC to pay for credit monitoring for the half-million Canadians affected.

The government announced on Jan. 11 that it had lost the personal information of 583,000 Canadians who were a part of the Canada Student Loans program from 2000 to 2006, not including those from Quebec, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories.

Earlier this week, the federal Human Resources, Skills and Social Development committee announced the deputy minister of human resources and "appropriate departmental officials" will appear before them to testify during their investigation into the privacy breach.

That session is scheduled for March 7.