

ATTACHMENT 7 – Item10

Mitigation of Risk to Respondents of Statistics Canada’s Surveys

**Research Data Centres Program,
Statistics Canada,
June 2010**

Statutory Protection:

The Statistics Act (1985) prescribes the mandate of the Agency, its role in the federal government, its powers and responsibilities, and its operating structure. Central to the Act's provisions is an implicit social contract with respondents under which the Agency may burden respondents with requests for information, and in some cases demand response, in order to provide information that is clearly of broad public benefit, but with an absolute undertaking to protect the confidentiality of identifiable individual responses.

Any disclosure of information that identifies an individual, business or organization is a punishable offense.

The confidentiality provisions of the Statistics Act are not affected by either the Access to Information Act or any other Legislation.

Consent:

The Privacy Act (1983) applies not only to the activities of Statistics Canada but to all federal government organizations. The Privacy Act requires that personal information must only be collected if it “relates to an operating program or activity of the institution”. In the case of Statistics Canada, this would include surveys collected under the provisions of the Statistics Act. The Privacy Act requires that the individual be informed of the purpose for which the personal information is being collected. It includes the right for an individual to know of, and have access to, their personal information. **Informed consent** is not a component of the Privacy Act.

However, informed consent is utilized by Statistics Canada as part of certain activities. With the exception of the Census of Population and the Labour Force Survey, all Statistics Canada household surveys are voluntary. Implicitly, participation in a voluntary survey requires consent. Respondents are informed of the voluntary nature of the survey through a notice prior to the start of the data collection, such as the one below. Interviewers are also instructed to permit respondents to refuse to answer any question or to terminate an interview at any time.

Your answers will be kept strictly confidential and used only for statistical purposes. While participation is voluntary, your cooperation is important to ensure that the information collected in this survey is as accurate and as comprehensive as possible.

Measures to protect the identity of respondents:

Data collection and nature of data files available for access:

- The majority of the data collected by Statistics Canada use sampling frames in which households are randomly sampled. Within selected households, sometimes all persons are requested to participate in the survey. In many cases, a random selection of a person within the household is done by the interviewer. The Census of Population and the Labour Force Survey are the only mandatory surveys due to the key role they play in the informing political and business decisions in the country.
- Background survey material explaining the data to be collected and the reasons for the data collection is provided to survey participants.
- Any microdata accessed by a researcher will have all personal identifiers, such as name, address, SIN, and personal health number removed from the record.
- Researchers may only access those data that are required for their particular project.

Procedures to access data:

- As required by the Policy on Government Security, researchers must obtain Reliability Status from the STC Departmental Security before having access to the data in the RDC. Security checks are conducted by the RCMP for each researcher accessing data in the RDC.
- As required by the Statistics Act, each researcher accessing data in the RDCs has deemed employee status and swears a legally binding oath to protect the confidentiality of Statistics Canada data utilized in the RDC. This oath is binding for life.
- Each researcher is required to attend an orientation session during which a RDC Analyst explains the researchers' legal responsibilities to protect the confidentiality and all the security measures in place within the RDC.
- There is a Statistics Canada employee on site to ensure the above measures are clearly understood and adhered to by all researchers participating in the RDC program.

Physical protection of data

- Each RDC is a secure physical environment where the only people permitted entry are researchers working on active approved projects and Statistics Canada staff.
- Doors to the facility are opened with secure swipe cards assigned to each researcher.
- Researchers are prohibited from having any electronic devices, such as laptop, PDAs or cell phones in the vicinity of their workstation
- The computing environment inside an RDC cannot be linked externally, in particular to the internet.
- The file structures and permissions are created to ensure that researchers have access only to the data for which they have received permission to use.

Control of released results:

- The RDC Analyst is the only person who can release analytical output from a RDC.

- All analytical output, including programs and compiled results, are vetted for confidentiality using rules developed by Statistics Canada methodologists.

Where confidentiality is at risk, the researcher and Analyst work together to eliminate the risk of disclosure and release the necessary information to answer the research question but at the same time, protect the confidentiality of respondent data.

