

## THE FAX

Because of their great speed in the transmission of documents and low cost of operation, fax machines have become a universal tool of communications between businesses and individuals. However, the confidentiality of messages transmitted by this device is far from offering all the guarantees of adequate protection of personal information.

To fax a document, we can use a fax or a computer. In the latter case, we have to resort to fax software that turns the computer into a fax or call upon the specialized services offered on the Internet network.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

Under the *Act respecting Access to documents held by public bodies and the Protection of personal information* and the *Act respecting the protection of personal information in the private sector*, public and private organizations must ensure the confidentiality of all personal information they collect, hold, use or communicate.

### Use of a fax or a computer

Security measures must be taken to protect the confidentiality of documents transmitted by fax. First, the fax or computer fax has to be located in a safe place, away from inquisitive eyes.

Then, administrative steps must be taken within the organization to identify personnel who handle personal information as part of their jobs. Only persons authorized to handle personal information in the performance of their duties should have access to such information.

The *Commission d'accès à l'information* urges public and private organizations to act preventively and adopt security measures to protect the confidentiality of personal information used in their operations.

## THE FAX OR COMPUTER MUST:

- be located in a supervised area where the public has no access;
- be used only by authorized personnel.

## AT ALL TIMES, THE USER MUST:

- check, before transmitting a document, whether the personal information it contains can be extracted;
- fill an accompanying form indicating the recipient's name, address and telephone number, and the sender's telephone number;
- verify the recipient's fax number after dialling;
- check the transmission report at the end of the communication;
- call the recipient to ensure the documents have been properly received.

WHEN TRANSMITTING PERSONAL INFORMATION, THE USER MUST:

- check the urgency of communicating personal information;
- clearly indicate its confidential character;
- notify the recipient of the time of transmission and make sure the recipient will be there to receive it;
- obtain confirmation from the person authorized to receive the information.

Public and private organizations should preserve the daily records of fax or computer fax transmissions since they constitute an element of proof of all transmissions.

**Some faxes are equipped with confidential transmission functions that allow for the use of access codes for the transmission and reception of a document.**

Faxing by computer through Internet

Various fax services are offered on Internet. They are accessible by means of a network navigator or certain fax software.

When a fax is dispatched as an electronic message, its confidentiality is not guaranteed. *The degree of confidentiality of electronic mail is often compared with that of a postcard.* For further information, refer to our bulletins on electronic mail and the Internet.