

Ten Reasons to Care

Citizens' right to government information is important to the healthy functioning of our society, and the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act is the best tool to ensure that we all have the ability to access government records and documents. On an individual level, Freedom of Information (FOI) affects everyone and every issue.

Top Ten Reasons why FOI Matters to You:

- Your taxes pay for governments, you deserve to know how they spend your money.
- FOIs are the best way to prevent and catch government corruption.
- Journalists use FOI to keep us informed on government decisions.
- Lawyers use FOI to both defend and prosecute individuals.
- FOIs are the best way to know if governments have hidden agendas.
- Environmental organisations use FOI to protect endangered species and habitats.
- FOI encourages governments to be more forthright and open with citizens.
- FOI requests can monitor the motivations for government decisions and help to ensure decisions are made for all citizens, not just those who support the governing party.
- Wrongful dismissals from government positions can be proven with the help of FOIs.
- Civil rights organisations use FOIs to ensure the government is not discriminating against any groups in society.

Ten Examples of FOI requests:

- March 2004 – A journalist's FOI request revealed that some provincial communication aids routinely track FOI requests, obtain the names of troublesome requesters, and identify them to ministers and top bureaucrats.
- March 2004 – A Vancouver Sun reporter's FOI request revealed that many of the 61 grizzly bears killed in 2002 and 2003 in defence of people or property were killed by big-game hunters. Often the big-game hunters were in search of other prey, or the grizzlies were shot after being lured by meat, garbage, domestic animals, or other food.
- February 2004 – A Sierra Legal Defence Fund FOI request reveals the provincial government refunded more than \$425,000 in fines and forgave hundreds of thousands of dollars in unpaid penalties assessed against salmon farmers for illegally expanding their operations.
- August 2003 – An FOI request by a Vancouver Sun reporter revealed that almost 80 per cent of raw-food samples and 30 per cent of cooked-food samples analysed by the BC Centre for Disease Control in 2002 exceeded bacterial health guidelines.
- April 2002 – A Canadian Press reporter's FOI request revealed the BC government could have sold Skeena Cellulose Inc. back to the private sector in 1999 for \$100 million, more than 16 times what it eventually got for it.
- March 2002 – The Vancouver Sun learned through an FOI request that at least four mentally disabled residents of Woodlands Institution were sterilized. The FOI also confirmed earlier reports that some mentally disabled residents were physically assaulted, verbally abused and inhumanely treated while living at the provincial home for the mentally disabled.

- December 2000 – A Vancouver Sun FOI request discovered the province's Ministry of the Environment was unable to properly respond to major environmental disasters because of a lack of trained personnel.
- August 1998 – The Vancouver Sun discovered through an FOI request that some BC government tax collectors enjoyed weekend holidays at resort hotels and sightseeing trips in rented cars at the public's expense.
- Feb 1997 – A Surrey parent discovered through an FOI request that the government was not following the province's priority list for school construction. Instead the government had approved construction for schools in ridings where the governments MLA had been elected.
- 1997 – A reporter for the Penticton Herald FOIed documents from the Ministry of the Environment about a company that was caught illegally dumping contaminated slag. The FOI information was key to piecing together a profile of the company.