

**Day 4 – Thursday, 29 November 2007**  
**Parallel Sessions – Session 4C 1.30pm-3.30pm**

Speaker: Mr. Sandy Hounsell

Position: Assistant Commissioner

Organisation: Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada

Presentation Title: Electronic Records and Access to Information – Have We Revolutionized the Process or Are We Simply Killing More Trees?

As technology advances at lightening speed, the modern workplace is becoming more and more digital and the rise of the electronic record is unprecedented. The use of word processing programs, spreadsheets, presentation programs, digital audio and video, electronic mail, etc. has become so common place that it is now hard to imagine how people managed just a decade ago, let alone 50 years ago. Along with the rise of the electronic record, we have also experienced a significant rise in the creation, recognition and use of modern access to information legislation. As such, while there is now a tendency to create more information, there is also a tendency to want access to more of that information. On its face, it may appear that the widespread use of electronic information should revolutionize the access to information process. However, the personal experiences highlighted in this paper, particularly with respect to e-mail, emphasize the need for caution and to the intricacies involved in seeking access to information stored in electronic form.

**Questions:**

From a general perspective, I would ask that people consider whether they believe that the proliferation of electronic records helps or hinders the access to information process?

The following specific questions could also usefully be considered:

- Technology allows us to create large numbers of records in a relatively short period of time. Is this bad or good? Is more necessarily better?
- In today's electronic environment there are often many versions of the same record. How can we identify the authentic original? Does it matter?
- When searching electronic records, who sets the search criteria? Is it reasonable to place restrictions on this criteria?
- Is an electronic record truly better than a paper record? Which would you prefer to work with?