



News Release

Post-9/11 Shift Seen in Employee Attitudes About Privacy, Security at Work

Survey: Employers Get High Marks from Employees on Privacy, But Tighter On-the-Job Security Procedures Wanted

HACKENSACK, N.J., April 16 /PRNewswire-FirstCall/ -- Most employees in American business, government, and non-profit workplaces today (76%) consider their employer's "privacy rules and practices" to be pretty good to excellent, according to the results of a Harris Interactive survey conducted for Privacy & American Business. For example, a whopping 94% say their employer has never released any personal information about them in a way they felt was improper. But there also are signs of new post-9/11 concerns: A majority of employees also feel that their employers should be strengthening ID procedures for entering premises and accessing computer systems, and doing more detailed background checks on job applicants. Thirty-five percent felt that their employer should do more detailed background checks on current employees.

First Survey in a Decade

The new employment privacy findings are the initial round of results from the first major national survey in a decade of business, government, and non-profit sector employees and managers on employee privacy issues. The survey was commissioned by Privacy & American Business (P&AB); designed by Professor Alan F. Westin of Columbia University, and President and Publisher of P&AB; conducted by Harris Interactive(SM); and underwritten by a grant from ChoicePoint®.

"This survey finds a trend that runs counter to current findings of consumer privacy surveys," observed Professor Westin, "where 80-90% say they are concerned about how businesses are

collecting and using their personal information, and express low trust in business privacy notices. Here, confidence in employers is high, though important issues are emerging.”

Professor Westin continued: “At the same time, there is an unmistakable post-September 11 tone in these findings. Clearly, workers want to know that employers are doing everything they can to keep inappropriate people out of workplaces. This attitude formed by recent events may explain to some extent why Americans in this survey seem more accepting and open-minded about their employer practices as they relate to privacy.”

“A clear example of trust in employers combined with post 9/11 concerns at the workplace,” Professor Westin noted, “is the following survey finding: four out of five employees and managers in all three sectors (81%) say they would be willing to have an ID card issued by their employer that would have on it their photo, basic personnel information, and a biometric identifier, such as a fingerprint, to enhance workplace security.”

The survey is the centerpiece of an upcoming national P&AB conference on “Privacy and Security in the New American Workplace,” being held May 21-22 at the Glenpointe Marriott, Teaneck, New Jersey, (NYC metropolitan area). The P&AB survey was conducted between March 27 and April 2, 2002 with 1,258 respondents who are employed full time or part time in either private, government or non-profit sectors. Eighty-three percent were full time employees and 17% part time, of which 66% are employees and 34% managers.

Among Issues of Concern to Many or Some Employees are the Following:

-- About one in four employees (24%) are concerned about how their employer handles employee medical and health information; this represents about 32 million employees.

-- While four out of five respondents (81%) do not believe their employer monitors their work in a way they consider improper, almost one in five (19%) have this concern, representing about 25 million employees.

-- Strong majorities of respondents believe it is acceptable for employers to include in their background checks of average employees such matters as criminal convictions (91%), official determinations of misconduct by professionals such as doctors or

stockbrokers (84%), and whether a job resume contains false information (92%). However, majorities feel it would not be acceptable to check whether an applicant has ever filed for bankruptcy (76%) or is a party to a civil lawsuit (67%).

-- Though 84% say it is important that their employer write and communicate to them a general employee privacy policy covering all uses of employee information and privacy-security issues at the workplace, only 38% of all employed adults say their current employer does this.

Full survey findings, a Report by Harris Interactive, with a Commentary by Professor Westin will be provided to each May Conference attendee, including comparisons of employee and manager perspectives. Many of the conference sessions are organized around the survey findings, with HR, Security, and Privacy officials from employers, HR industry association experts, and academic and employee-rights spokespersons responding to the findings.

Case studies of how exemplary business and government-agency employers are developing new privacy and security policies for the post-9/11 environment will be presented.

A special feature of the conference will be the discussion of a Model HR Privacy Code of Practice for U.S. Employers, four years under development by P&AB and HR Officials from leading private-sector organizations. After discussions led by Washington privacy-law expert and P&AB editor Robert R. Belair and input from the Conference attendees, this Code will be made public by P&AB and offered for employer and employer-association consideration.

The Conference will also feature an Exhibit of Privacy and Security Tools and Services where HR software firms, security and biometric product vendors, privacy and security consulting firms, HR and legal publishers and newsletters, and law firms with HR practices will participate.

Co-sponsoring the conference with P&AB are the International Security Management Association, the Equal Employment Advisory Council, the International Human Resources Information Management Association, and the Workplace Rights Institute.

For further information about the Conference or to register, visit www.pandab.org or contact Olga Garey at (201) 996-1154 or info@pandab.org.

About Privacy & American Business

Privacy & American Business, (www.pandab.org & www.PrivacyExchange.org), is an activity of the non-profit Center for Social & Legal Research, a non-profit, non-partisan public policy think tank exploring U.S. and global issues of consumer and employee privacy and data protection since its launch in 1993. P&AB was the first to chart and analyze for business the rise of consumer and HR privacy from a second-tier concern to a front-burner issue and to provide opportunities in programs and meetings to assist businesses in understanding the privacy environment as it is evolving. Members of the press may contact Irene Oujo at (201) 996-1154 or ioujo@pandab.org or visit www.pandab.org. Those interested in attending the Conference or for more Conference information, contact Olga Garey at (201) 996-1154 or info@pandab.org.

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About Harris Interactive

Harris Interactive is a worldwide market research and consulting firm, best known for The Harris Poll® and its pioneering use of the Internet to conduct scientifically accurate market research. Strengthened by its recent merger with Total Research Corporation, the Company now combines the power of technology with international expertise in predictive, custom, strategic research. Headquartered in the United States, with offices in the United Kingdom, Japan and a global network of local market and opinion research firms, the Company conducts international research with fluency in multiple languages. For more information, visit www.harrisinteractive.com or contact Nancy Wong, 585-214-7316, nwong@harrisinteractive.com