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## Research agreements required by law

**Gary Mitchell**

Special to the Sun

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Re: Draconian rules on archive use puts a chill on researchers, Nov. 28

To clarify, a University of Victoria history professor agreed to a research agreement so that he could continue his studies.

Why a research agreement? The professor's study on the history of human rights would require him to access information protected by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. To apply the act, personal information would need to be removed from the archival records to allow for general access.

To facilitate research access in a more practical manner, the BC Archives uses research agreements to allow researchers broader access to statutorily restricted records within a set of specified controls.

These terms were agreed to and this included site inspection of the location where the records relating to the research agreement were being kept.

It is the responsibility of the Royal BC Museum and the BC Archives to protect and preserve the integrity and authenticity of the documentary heritage of British Columbia.

We are concerned with providing access as well as ensuring the protection of individual citizens according to the laws of B.C. and Canada.

The legislation around the protection of privacy and access applies to the Royal BC Museum and the BC Archives as it does with all public institutions.

For us, the requirement to conduct regular inspection of research agreement-holders was a direct request from the information and privacy commissioner.

The ability to access sensitive archival records carries a burden of responsibility not only on the archives and its staff but on the researchers.

The responsibility of the researcher to protect citizens' identities and their personal information are embodied in the archives research agreement.

By agreeing to the terms, the researcher acknowledges those responsibilities.

Gary Mitchell is the provincial archivist of British Columbia.

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