

How CPIC works

July 19, 2008

The first step

A criminal history file is created the first time an individual is charged by police. In most cases, it will be reported by the charging police service to the Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC), a central database.

The database, administered by the RCMP in Ottawa since it went online in 1972, then opens a temporary file accessible only to the charging police service. It is supposed to be destroyed by CPIC after five years if there is no disposition in the case.

After a conviction

If the charge results in a conviction, a permanent file – a "criminal record" – is created. Cases where there is an acquittal, or charges are stayed or withdrawn, also remain in the national system and, depending on the nature of the case, are purged after a set amount of time. These criminal "histories," until purged, remain searchable by police but are not considered for court purposes a criminal record. Cases ending in a conditional or absolute discharge, while not considered a conviction, are also tracked but are no longer nationally accessible following three- and one-year periods, respectively.

Who gets access

The CPIC information can be viewed by some government departments and agencies and more than 80,000 law enforcement officers from across the country. Records are added and purged over time. In 2007, the database was accessed an average 392,792 times each day.

Removing records

Last year, 121,296 new criminal histories were added, and 35,394 were purged. Most purging occurs after charges are dropped, the person dies, the record is inactive for a set period, by police request, or if there is a court order to destroy a record.

Different CPIC levels

There are three levels to the criminal history section of CPIC, and varying degrees of access.

The **Criminal Name Index** (CNI), the most basic, is simply a list of names of people for whom a criminal record may exist.

The next level, the **Criminal Record Synopsis**, is a more robust database containing

personal information and physical characteristics. It indicates which of 15 criminal offence types – such as violence, weapons and criminal driving – a person has been charged with, whether they have been convicted and warnings if a person is considered dangerous to themselves or others. There are no exact charges. For violence, for example, the underlying charge can range from assault to murder.

This is the level available to police officers via computers in their cruisers. It is used to check for criminal histories and warnings. The *Star* has obtained a snapshot of this data set. Personal information that could identify an individual, including name and date of birth, has been removed in the *Star's* copy.

The RCMP denied the *Star* access to the next level, known as **Criminal Records II**, or full criminal record, which contains the most detailed information regarding Canadians with criminal records, including exact charges, dates of convictions, detailed dispositions and where the crimes took place. Police can request this deeper information.

Young offenders

The rules for the keeping, sharing and purging of young offender records are more restrictive than adult records. Employers, for example, must go to family court to access a youth record. Once a youth record has reached its "nondisclosure" date, it becomes illegal for police, the courts and other bodies to share it with anyone.