

The RCMP Are Being Investigated Over Controversial Spy Tech

Written by Jordan Pearson - April 13, 2016 // 11:29 AM EST



Image: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Canada's federal police force is being investigated by the country's top privacy watchdog for its use of a controversial mass surveillance device.

A spokesperson from the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada (OPC) confirmed to Motherboard that it has opened an investigation into the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's use of IMSI catchers, or "StingRays." These devices are essentially fake cell phone towers that force phones in the vicinity to connect and reveal identifying information.

The use of such devices has been the topic of much heated discussion and public debate in the US. The [Florida Supreme Court ruled](#) that the warrantless use of StingRays by police is unconstitutional in 2014. StingRays are controversial because they target devices within a certain area, and thus risk violating the privacy of innocents.

A leaked email from Correctional Services Canada last year indicated that an unnamed, StingRay-like device was [installed in an Ontario prison](#) to monitor inmate communications, but also caught innocent people outside the facility in the dragnet.

"These are fundamentally tools of mass surveillance," said David Christopher of OpenMedia, the organization that filed the privacy complaint that spurred OPC's investigation.

Canadian police have been extraordinarily unforthcoming when it comes to the use of IMSI catchers, or StingRays.

Last month, seven men accused in a Quebec court case relating to a mafia slaying pleaded guilty, but not before the RCMP was forced to reveal in open court that they had used a so-called "mobile device identifier"—the RCMP's term for IMSI catchers—in the course of their investigation. The end of the case meant that [the RCMP will reveal no more information](#) about its use of IMSI catchers in court.

"The RCMP will continue cooperating with the Privacy Commissioner on this matter," an RCMP spokesperson wrote me in an email.

In British Columbia, Vancouver police are [embroiled in a public battle](#) to keep the details of their use of IMSI catchers secret.

An OPC report on the RCMP's use of the technology, however, may finally shed some much-needed light on the police's use of a highly controversial and potentially privacy-destroying surveillance device.

"In order to have a debate, we first need to get the facts on the table," Christopher said.

Visit the ASP Website: <http://www.advancedsecurityprotection.com/services/technical-surveillance-countermeasures-tscm-debugging>