

Region of Southern Denmark recommended for fine

Date: 17-09-2021

News

The Danish Data Protection Authority assesses that the Region of Southern Denmark had not safeguarded against accidental publication of personal data on the region's website.

The Danish Data Protection Authority has reported the Region of Southern Denmark to the police for not having established sufficient security measures. The region had not secured against personal data being inadvertently published on their website.

The Danish Data Protection Authority has proposed a fine of DKK 500,000.

On 9 March 2020, the Danish Data Protection Authority received a notification of a breach of personal data security from Region Southern Denmark. The notification stated that a PowerPoint presentation prepared for educational purposes at Odense University Hospital with diagrams containing personal data - including health information and information about social security numbers - on 3,915 patients had been available on the website of Region Southern Denmark since May 2011. The information appeared from the diagram's underlying data.

Region Southern Denmark used a screening tool to regularly scan whether social security numbers had been inadvertently published on the region's website. However, the screening tool could not scan the underlying data in PowerPoint presentations and that was the reason why the region had not met the requirements for an appropriate level of security in the data protection regulation.

In this context, the Danish Data Protection Authority found that the Region of Southern Denmark had not established appropriate security measures, so that the region was able to carry out appropriate quality control of the content of published documents.

Inadequate security measures

In connection with the processing of the case by the Data Protection Authority, Region Southern Denmark stated that since March 2013 the region had used the mentioned screening tool to scan documents on the region's website for social security numbers that had been published unintentionally. The screening tool did not scan for other types of information, including e.g. health information.

Region Southern Denmark only discovered when Odense University Hospital was contacted by a citizen about the PowerPoint

presentation in February 2020 that the screening tool was unable to find social security numbers in e.g. charts' underlying data in PowerPoint presentations.

"Unfortunately, we regularly see that authorities inadvertently publish information about citizens on websites. When documents are published which may potentially contain personal data, it is our opinion that the authority must always consider the relevance of prior and subsequent control measures. In a case like the present one, where the region processes large amounts of sensitive information about many citizens, the requirements for the risk considerations that the region must carry out are increased, just as the requirements for the actually implemented measures are tightened," says head of office Frederik Viksøe Siegumfeldt.

The Danish Data Protection Authority generally found that Region Southern Denmark did not have sufficient knowledge of the functionality of the screening tool. In addition, the Region had not conducted ongoing appropriate screening of files for personal information that had been inadvertently disclosed. The region had also not continuously tested the effectiveness of the region's security measures associated with the screening of files published on the region's website.

The Danish Data Protection Authority also assessed that the Region of Southern Denmark should have established measures – either technical or organizational – that enabled the region to screen the region's website for other types of information, including e.g. health information.

Why report to the police?

The Danish Data Protection Authority always makes a concrete assessment of the seriousness of the case pursuant to Article 83, paragraph 1 of the Data Protection Regulation. 2, when assessing which sanction is the correct one in the opinion of the supervisory authority.

In assessing that a fine should be imposed, the Danish Data Protection Authority has emphasized that Region Southern Denmark processes large amounts of personal data, including health information - which is of a sensitive nature - and information about social security numbers.

The Danish Data Protection Authority has also emphasized that the region has a heightened obligation to protect this information against accidental publication or disclosure, and that in this connection it is particularly the responsibility of regions that publish many documents and large amounts of information to carry out an appropriate control of published documents and information.

Do you want to know more?

Learn more about your obligations as a data controller and which conditions are decisive for you.