

Danger seen of computers' invading privacy



The danger of computers' taking away privacy from people should be of concern to the computer industry, which should establish a code of ethics to prevent such a thing happening, said the managing director of International Computers, Ltd (Mr A. L. C. Humphreys), in Christchurch yesterday.

Mr Humphreys said that everybody in the course of their lives continuously provided information about themselves to some-one.

"We give information on matters of health, when making insurance claims and asking for insurance cover, on taxation matters, when there are births and marriages, and when we apply for credit or mortgages.

"A lot of people have a lot of information about us," said Mr Humphreys.

All this information at present was recorded separately, but it could be brought together very easily and stored in computers—and this was where the privacy of people was in danger, said Mr Humphreys.

Having so much information lying around was a potential risk, Mr Humphreys said. At the moment, there was no single agency anywhere which gathered and stored information on a whole society — but it could happen.

"There is great concern today about pollution of the air and water and people says industry should have been more responsible. I am concerned about the invasion of privacy, which could be called a pollution of human dignity," said Mr Humphreys.

"This pollution hasn't taken place yet to any great

extent; but the computer industry should be taking the lead to establish a standard of ethics for those who use and operate computer before such pollution does take place."

Mr Humphreys said that his own company, which employed about 37,000 people, had strict rules on how its management information system was used.

It was not possible for an unauthorised person to get information about an employee, as confidential information could only be obtained by application to the manager, who had the appropriate access code

Some information was available only through him as managing director, said Mr Humphreys, but other information was inaccessible to him except through the personnel director.

"We seek to preserve the privacy and independence of the individual, and this applies to his professional privacy as well as his personal privacy," said Mr Humphreys.

"We set our own standards in our own company, but it is something the computer industry as a whole should be looking at."

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