

In July of 2010, the RCMP changed the requirements for fingerprinting people who plan to work with the Vulnerable Sector. While that change assists in protecting the vulnerable in our society, it has resulted in delays not previously experienced. The following are some of the frequently asked questions about the fingerprinting process and why delays now occur. It is hoped that they will be useful in answering your questions.

Who is affected by the backlog in Background Checks?

Anyone who wishes to work with vulnerable people will be affected by the backlog. A vulnerable person means a person who, because of their age, disability, or other circumstances, whether temporary or permanent, are (a) in a position of dependence on others or (b) are otherwise at a greater risk than the general population of being harmed by a person in a position of authority or trust relative to them.

Why is there a backlog in Background Checks?

The London Police Service has experienced larger volumes of background checks this year because more agencies are making use of this important service. The month of August 2010, for example, showed a 39% increase over August of 2009. But this is only part of picture.

The main reason for the backlog is a decision made by the RCMP in July of 2010. The decision addressed a situation with those who have legally changed their name in Canada. In most provinces and territories fingerprints are not taken when a person changes their name. This can lead to risk in the vulnerable screening process once the person has received a pardon for a sexual offence – one that may reasonably put the vulnerable at risk. To properly screen people who may have been sexual offenders and have received a pardon, the RCMP introduced a change to the vulnerable screening process. This has caused a large effort in verifying the identity of people who may apply to work with the vulnerable.

Why did I have to get fingerprinted and others did not?

Due to the name change problem in Canada, the RCMP now performs two queries against the file of pardoned offences. The first query is the same as it always was – a query using the name, gender and date of birth of the applicant. If nothing was returned on that query, a query is done by just date of birth and gender. This was to identify pardoned sex offenders who had changed their name. The change is a good one in concept – it helps protect the vulnerable. However, it has come with significant impacts in workload. Therefore, if you have the same date of birth as someone who has a pardoned sex offence, then you are a potential match and fingerprinting will properly determine your identity.

What impact did the RCMP change have?

Overnight the number of possible matches against the file of pardoned offences went up dramatically in virtually all police services across the country. The London Police Service used to have between 10 and 20 possible matches per year for sexual offences for which a pardon had been granted. Now the London Police Service experiences more than 10 per day. Previously the London Police Service did the majority of vulnerable checks within 7 business days. Now the wait has been more than three times that, even after having used resources from other areas of the police service to assist with the checks.

The London Police Service is working on ways to streamline the process, which may eventually reduce the wait time.

Why do these possible matches need to be confirmed by fingerprints?

These possible matches have to be confirmed by fingerprints to determine that they are not the pardoned sex offender. In almost all of the possible matches, the applicant is not the pardoned sex offender, but fingerprints allow the person's identify to be verified. There is much extra work involved in the new process. We have to make up packages to be sent away, arrange dates for fingerprinting and arrange for staff to complete the fingerprinting. When the fingerprints are returned from the RCMP we the have to do the remainder of the work involved in the check. There is much new work to do.

How quickly can I be fingerprinted?

Usually an appointment for fingerprinting can be made within 2 weeks.

What happens with my fingerprints after they are taken?

The fingerprints are sent to Ottawa for positive identification, which takes from 4 to 5 weeks. The RCMP destroys fingerprints sent to them for the purposes of Vulnerable Screening. Most police services in Canada, including the London Police Service, have not had time to finalize their policy on fingerprints. The London Police Service will destroy the (vulnerable screening) fingerprints if asked to do so, but if asked, may also keep them on file to speed up future applications for that applicant. The applicant has that choice. A policy on this matter will be finalized in the near future.

How does this impact employers and volunteer agencies?

We ask employers and volunteer agencies to be patient and understanding because these delays are not the fault of the applicants. The London Police Service, and most other police services in Canada, are not able to keep up with the demand since this change was made.

The London Police Service would like to ask employers to look at their process and ask for record checks earlier if they know that checks will be needed (charity event, etc.).

The change is a good one in that it protects the vulnerable in our society. But police services did not have a chance to prepare for the impact of this change. Therefore service has suffered and we regret that.

Why does the London Police Service charge a \$13.56 fee for fingerprinting services required for background checks?

The London Police Service is not able to absorb the significant number of fingerprint services that must now be done as a result of the change mentioned above. Therefore, the Service must charge a minimal fee (\$12 plus HST = \$13.56) simply to cover the cost of having staff available to do the work. There are a number of companies that provide fingerprinting services but fees can be as high as \$60.

Where can I find more information?

The RCMP web site supplies more information at:

<http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cr-cj/vulner/index-eng.htm>