



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

March 21, 2006

The Editor
Victoria Times Colonist

Re: "The province doesn't want anyone to know," March 18.

Compliance with environmental requirements is the No. 1 priority of the Ministry of Environment (MOE). In fact, our last budget dedicated an additional \$1.5 million to compliance and enforcement initiatives, including the creation of a specialized industrial and commercial investigative unit for the first time.

The previous non-compliance reporting system was inconsistent. It published only a limited cross-section of non-compliance incidents. This caused fairness issues that undermined MOE efforts to work with people to achieve our goal of encouraging compliance and preventing damage before it occurs.

This past year, the Ministry signed a \$1.3 million contract to implement a new, consolidated Authorization Management System (AMS) to begin replacing 62 antiquated computer systems from the 1990s that hindered consistent reporting. The new system will allow the ministry to track and report compliance, something that was not previously possible. This will help the Ministry publish regular, clear and consistent compliance and enforcement summaries.

With respect to the information request from Sierra Legal Defence Fund (SLDF), the cost estimate they received from ministry staff is based on estimated staff time needed to search for and compile the huge volume of information they are requesting. To search for the estimated 52,000 records would require over 5,300 taxpayer supported staff hours (three people working every day for a full year).

We are committed to providing access to information at minimal or no cost to the public. In fact, 86 per cent of FOI requests received by the Ministry of Environment are provided free of charge, including previous requests by SLDF

The Ministry is prepared to work with SLDF to provide the information they require; however, we also want to ensure that Ministry staff are where we need them most - in the field, protecting our environment.

Barry Penner
Minister of Environment