

Online Government Information: Access

By Kristina Oldenburg.

[BC Laws](#), a free online source for current legislation, is expanding both its content and the generosity of its license. This occurs as QP LegalEze, a paid subscription service, winds down.

Meanwhile, the federal government has discreetly removed a blanket use license. It had previously granted rights to a fairly wide range of uses for many types of documents. However, the right to reproduce federal legislation and court decisions remains.

BC legal information online: Content

This spring, QP LegalEze announced that it would shut down after moving all its content to BC Laws.

QP LegalEze includes regulations, statutes, and the BC Gazette (Part I and II). There are also point-in-time consolidations going back about thirty years: this means users can access legislation as it looked in the 1990s.

BC Laws had always included current laws and regulations, but now it has point-in-time. For the acts I checked, point-in-time went back about ten years.

The BC Gazette is yet to be available on BC Laws, but is marked as “coming soon.” Part I of the Gazette contains government legal notices, and Part II contains new regulations.

An exciting addition to BC Laws is the Orders in Council (OIC) collection. There is current content, plus digitized OICs going back to 1870, complete with scans of the original index.

Curious whether the mayor of Victoria was successful in getting \$50 for the care of a “destitute British Seaman,” or what provisions were made for “Lunatics – Safe keeping and treatment in BC”? Wondering if Young H. and Cook J. were granted their liquor license at Granville? The 1872 OIC index will point you to the answers!

All of this new BC Laws content is presented on an updated interface. There are clear indexes along the left of the page, including navigation to updated and new laws. For an alternate access point on the same page, click one of the ghostly spheres orbiting in the photo.

Expanded permissions: BC

Once users have found their act, regulation, or OIC, what can they do with it? The new [Queen’s Printer license](#) grants a “worldwide, royalty-free, perpetual, non-exclusive license” to reproduce legislative material for “lawful and non-commercial” purposes.

This requires inclusion of the license statement: a citation, a disclaimer, and the bolded, all-caps caution that **THESE MATERIALS ARE NOT AN OFFICIAL VERSION** [emphasis in original].

Meanwhile in Ottawa

In the fall of 2010, the federal Crown Copyright and Licensing service expanded the right to use Government of Canada works—such as reports—for non-commercial purposes. The Crown Copyright page included a blanket statement, permitting users to “reproduce Government of Canada works, in part or in whole, and by any means, for personal or public non-commercial purposes, or for cost-recovery purposes” ([cited by Fodden 2010](#)).

This changed three years later. Effective November 18, 2013, the Crown Copyright and Licensing page states that anyone seeking copyright clearance must now [contact individual departments](#) for permission.

Canadian copyright professor Michael Geist tweeted Tony Clement, Treasury Board president, about the Crown Copyright changes ([2013](#)). Clement responded that the non-commercial use policy is still in effect for all departments ([2013](#)).

All federal department websites I checked have since added permissions statements to their websites, outlining what users can do with the material. These follow the “[Global notices for Government of Canada departments](#)” template provided by the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat.

They departmental statements allow unrestricted reproduction for non-commercial use, with various caveats about appropriate attribution, and instructions not to represent content as an official version or reproduce symbols.

Websites with outside content—such as the [Canadian Museum of Nature](#) and the [Canadian](#)

[Centre for Occupational Health and Safety](#)—have more restrictive use statements, reflecting the fact that their content comes from a variety of creators.

So what do you do if you want to save or distribute federal website content? Check the “Terms and conditions” link; there is one at the bottom left of the homepage of almost every federal department.

Federal legislation? That’s still cool

Federal laws and court cases are still reproducible without permission. The *Reproduction of Federal Law Order* permits anyone to “without charge or request for permissions, reproduce enactments... of the Government of Canada, and decisions... of federally-constituted courts... provided due diligence is exercised in ensuring the accuracy... and the reproduction is not represented as an official version” ([SI/97-5](#)).

Kristina Oldenburg is a Vancouver librarian. Most of her encounters with government documents occur at the Metro Vancouver Harry Lash Corporate Library.

References

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