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News / Kitchener

# Waterloo Region reviews policy on deleting emails

By: Staff Metroland News Service Published on Fri Jun 07 2013

WATERLOO REGION — As the provincial government and Toronto Mayor Rob Ford deal with controversy about deleted emails, the Region of Waterloo is trying to sort out what the rules are here.

"I think they should all be saved," North Dumfries Mayor Rob Deutschmann said. "It's government business. It's the people's business."

Ann Cavoukian, Ontario's information and privacy commissioner, slammed officials in former Premier Dalton McGuinty's office and the Ministry of Energy this week for deleting emails about the cancellation of gas plants in Oakville and Mississauga.

Last week, Ford received a cautionary letter from Cavoukian after media reports that email and phone records of some former staffers were ordered deleted.

Ford has been swept up in controversy surrounding a video that allegedly shows him smoking crack. He's denied those allegations and that emails were ordered destroyed.

Regional Coun. Tom Galloway said there's been no policy direction from the province about rules for keeping electronic communications.

"Nobody's really been able to define that line and I'm not sure how it's going to be defined," he said.

The region has an official information retention and disposal policy in place. It sets out how long records — relating to everything from council minutes to employee discipline — are kept. Local cities have similar policies.

But the difference between what staff and councillors must keep isn't clear, nor is the policy on email.

"There's a bit of a grey area here in terms of what you keep and what you don't keep," Regional Chair Ken Seiling said.

Seiling said he receives so many emails it would be impossible to keep them all.

"A good number of them, they've got no value to anyone, not even me," he said.

What councillors are required to keep right now includes messages related to decisions on regional business or in response to litigation, arbitration or a formal freedom of information request.

"Councillors have every right to be concerned because there is a lot of controversy over things like email," said regional clerk Kris Fletcher.

Fletcher is researching what the guidelines are and will bring a report to council in August or September.

The move stems from a legal hold policy approved in September.

It set out criteria for holding records in the event of litigation, a human rights investigation or a freedom of information request.

For Deutschmann, the issue isn't about fear of repercussions for deleting the wrong email.

"For me it comes down to not so much being in trouble — it's more like a public trust issue," he said.



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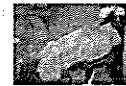
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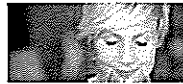
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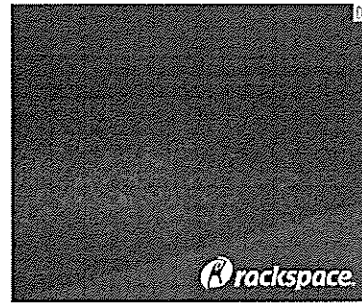
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Megan Harris, director of communications in Waterloo, said the city's retention policy applies to all records. It was introduced in 1990 and a review is currently underway

"This retention is for a record regardless of its form and does not differ by record format (paper versus electronic etc.)," Harris said in an email.

The City of Cambridge has its own policy. It says emails not deemed records should be deleted after 90 days.

"An important objective is to maintain transparency and detailed record-keeping for matters before us," said Linda Fegan, director of corporate communications and marketing.



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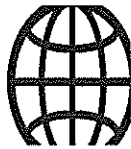
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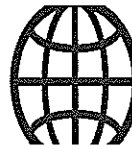
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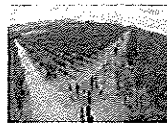


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