



## MINISTRY OF ATTORNEY GENERAL

### Province Takes Action On Video Game Violence

July 17, 2000 00-109 "

VICTORIA - The B.C. government will move forward to develop a new classification system that will protect children from violent video games, Attorney General Andrew Petter said today.

"This kind of entertainment is a lot different than just going to the movie theatre at the mall," said Petter. "The interactive nature of video games makes young people more vulnerable to violent or sexual content."

Petter said that a "made in B.C." classification system will be developed to inform parents about the content of video games and home videos that are currently not subject to classification. Public input is being sought on the classification system, and a consultation group including the games industry, local government and the public will advise the government on implementation issues.

Under the current B.C. Motion Picture Act regulations, there is a progressive classification system for movies. However, video games and home videos are not subject to the same system. Such games and videos are only subject to classification by the B.C. Film Classification Office if they are submitted by distributors or are subject to a public complaint and are rated as "adult" entertainment.

Petter said that leaves a big gap because many video games and home videos that are not classified as "adult" are nonetheless extremely violent.

"There is compelling evidence that violent entertainment can harm children," said Penny Bain, director of the B.C. Institute Against Family Violence. "A comprehensive classification system will give parents the tools they need to make informed decisions about what their children are watching and playing."

Last week, following a complaint, the ministry's film classification office classified the video game *Soldier of Fortune* as adult material because of its realistic and brutal depictions of violence. As a result, minors can no longer rent or buy the game.

"I applaud the attorney general for taking action on the issue of video violence: council looks forward to working with the province to protect children," said Burnaby councillor Dan Johnston, chair of the community issues and social planning committee.

Mark Halliday, Canadian vice-president of the Video Software Dealers Association, said: "If the classification system is to be reviewed, we are eager to work with government and other interested parties to address the concerns around video violence."

"Parents have the final responsibility for ensuring that their children view appropriate material," said Petter. "We need to ensure that they have the best information available to fulfil that responsibility."

Written submissions from the public on ways to address the issue of video violence can be sent to:

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If you wish to send your comments by e-mail, please use the form at our Web site:

[www.ag.gov.bc.ca/contacts/ministry\\_email.htm](http://www.ag.gov.bc.ca/contacts/ministry_email.htm)

## Ministry of Attorney General Backgrounder

### Video Game Violence

Modern technological advances have created video (including computer) games that are increasingly interactive and highly sophisticated, with life-like images. Unfortunately, some of these games use this same technology to portray realistic and gratuitous violence.

When the Director of Film Classification classified the video game *Soldier of Fortune* as adult material last week, British Columbia became the first Canadian jurisdiction to take action on the issue of video violence. By now moving to a comprehensive classification system for video games and home videos, parents will have more tools to determine what is appropriate viewing for their children.

The ministry will ask the public for input on:

- The best way to extend B.C.'s classification system for movies to video games and home videos.
- What restrictions should be in place to limit children's access to video games and home videos deemed unsuitable for them.
- How to implement the classification system on a self-financing basis.

Right now, under B.C. Motion Picture Act regulations, the B.C. Film Classification Office classifies movies shown publicly, but it can only classify videos intended for home viewing if the content is adult or excessively violent.

Some video games are rated voluntarily through the U.S.-based Entertainment Software Rating Board, which is operated by the entertainment software industry. A comprehensive "made in B.C." classification system would ensure consistency and reflect B.C. values and standards.

Concern about the level of violence in electronic games has been growing. Some B.C. municipalities, including Burnaby, have passed resolutions urging the attorney general to impose tougher restrictions and a better classification system for video games.

Even young people have concerns. A study done by the Media Analysis Laboratory (October 1998) at Simon Fraser University found 90 per cent of teens owned at least some video or computer games, but 85 per cent of teens said that video games can have a harmful effect on kids. Only 15 per cent thought they had no harmful effect.

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## MINISTRY OF ATTORNEY GENERAL

### B.C. Calls For National Strategy To Counter Media Violence

September 7, 2000 00:144

VICTORIA - British Columbia will ask Canada's justice ministers for a national strategy to counter child and youth-targeted violence in the media, Attorney General Andrew Petter said today.

"Recent studies have shown that media violence desensitizes children and youth to real violence and can condition them to accept violence as a normal and legitimate means for resolving disputes," said Petter.

"Given the surge of high-tech images aimed at children, and the convergence of computers, television and the Internet into a single technology, we need to identify the sources and types of violence to which young people are exposed. A national action plan is needed to increase public awareness and counter the adverse impacts of media violence upon children and youth."

Petter will raise the issue next week at a meeting of Canada's justice ministers in Iqaluit, Nunavut. B.C. will also ask other governments to follow the province's lead in developing a classification system for video games.

"We are determined to protect children and reduce violence in our society," said Petter. "Developing a video game classification system in B.C. will give parents the information they need to decide what is appropriate for their families."

At the meeting, B.C. will propose other measures to protect youth, including action to prevent children from being preyed upon by pimps and sexual predators, and from being recruited into criminal activity by youth gangs.

"I am especially concerned about the need to stop sexual predators from contacting children through the Internet," said Petter. "In the same way new technology is exposing more children to violent imagery, the Internet is giving criminals greater access to children and youth they aim to exploit."

Petter will also be seeking Criminal Code changes that reflect B.C.'s determination to be tough on serious crime. He will push for the elimination of conditional sentences for high-risk violent offenders and renew B.C.'s call for a national dangerous offender registry.

In addition, B.C. will argue for more equitable federal funding for the province's justice system and will seek increased federal support for legal aid, fighting organized crime and filling RCMP vacancies.

British Columbia's discussion paper on violence, the media and children can be found on the Ministry of Attorney General Web [site](#).

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**MINISTRY OF ATTORNEY GENERAL****Province Announces Strategy to Turn Off Violence**

Oct. 17, 2000 00:178

BURNABY - Declaring media violence a threat to children, Premier Ujjal Dosanjh, Attorney General Andrew Petter and Education Minister Penny Priddy today launched a new provincial strategy to promote safe communities, safe schools and safe media.

The province's Turn Off Violence strategy will help parents, youth, police and communities to counter violence and develop positive alternatives for young people.

"Violence must be prevented before it starts," said Dosanjh. "We need to help parents and communities to protect children who are being targeted with violent images every day in television, movies and video games."

- The new strategy has four goals:
- Helping parents to reduce the level of media violence to which their children are exposed.
- Supporting youth through programs to counter violence in schools and the community.
- Providing police with tools to combat gang recruitment and other criminal activity targeted at youth.
- Empowering communities to implement their own anti-violence initiatives.

"The strategy will include a classification system that is being developed for videos and video games sold or rented in the province," said Petter. "We know that violence in media has harmful effects on our children, and we are determined to help parents control the level of violence to which their children are exposed."

Also announced today as parts of the strategy are two new programs, Kids 'n' Action and Youth in Action, which will encourage children and youth to develop their own violence- prevention programs in schools. In addition a permanent police officer will be assigned to the B.C. Safe School Centre to make it easier for teachers, students and police to work together to combat school-based violence.

"School safety is crucial to keeping communities crime and violence-free," said Priddy. "Involving students through school-based violence- and crime-prevention strategies led by youth helps keep our schools and communities safe."

Petter said the province will continue to push Ottawa to protect young people from violence by strengthening the Criminal Code by making it an offence to recruit young people into criminal gangs, for example. Further components of the strategy will be announced in the coming weeks.

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Backgrounder attached.

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**MINISTRY OF ATTORNEY GENERAL****Communities Get Tools To Turn Off Violence**

Oct. 24, 2000 00:181

VICTORIA - B.C. communities are getting support to develop community safety plans under the province's turn off violence strategy, Attorney General Andrew Petter and Municipal Affairs Minister Cathy McGregor announced today.

"The safe community action program gives local governments tools, expertise and funding to help them evaluate their safety needs and develop a plan of action," Petter said. "Communities will be able to make decisions and set their own directions to turn off violence."

The program includes a series of safe-community guidebooks, which cover everything from establishing a crime-prevention working group, to researching local crime trends, to setting priorities and starting prevention programs.

As well, the province has appointed seven regional crime-prevention co-ordinators who will work with communities to support local safety efforts.

"Communities know best what their needs are," McGregor said. "With this safe- communities program, we are empowering communities to develop their own crime-prevention strategies. We will work with local governments to keep their neighbourhoods safe for B.C. families."

Under the program, communities will also be able to get up to \$15,000 to develop safety plans which identify crime concerns and outline a co-ordinated community response.

Petter and McGregor made the announcement at the annual convention of the Union of B.C. Municipalities. Jim Abram, first vice-president of UBCM, welcomed the plan, confirming the organization will take part in the funding process.

"The program allows communities to develop local solutions," Abram said. "It recognizes that the safety concerns of urban centres are different from those of rural communities. We look forward to working with the province on this."

"This effort to get all British Columbians involved in turning off violence is important because we all have the right to live without fear in a community where we feel safe," said Tani Berbenuik, executive director of the B.C. Block Parent Society.

The safe-community action plan is part of the province's new Turn Off Violence strategy to promote safe communities, safe schools and safe media. It is supported in part by B.C.'s current funding allocation from the National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention, a partnership between B.C. and the federal government.

Copies of the Safe Communities Planning Kit are available from the regional crime prevention co-ordinators or from the Ministry of Attorney General community programs division at (604) 660-2605 in Vancouver.

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[Backgrounder attached](#)



## MINISTRY OF ATTORNEY GENERAL

### Petter Takes Anti-Violence Strategy To Washington, D.C.

Oct. 25, 2000 00:182

VICTORIA - Video-game violence will be on the table when Attorney General Andrew Petter meets with high-level officials in Washington, D.C. in the latest step in B.C.'s Turn off Violence strategy.

Petter will meet next week with the chair of the U.S. Federal Trade Commission and senior counsel for Senators Joseph Lieberman and John McCain to gather information for B.C.'s video and video game classification system.

"Recent studies by the trade commission have exposed the fact that the entertainment industry has deliberately marketed violent products to children," Petter said. "These meetings will enable us to exchange information on steps being taken in the U.S. to curb these marketing practices and on B.C.'s initiative to protect consumers through a classification system."

Petter meets Monday with trade commission chair Robert Pitofsky and Jodie Bernstein, director of the commission's consumer protection division. The commission has already reviewed existing video game classification systems, including the one implemented by the industry's entertainment software rating board.

"B.C. is recognized as a leader in North America when it comes to taking a stand against video-game violence," Petter said. "A responsive and responsible rating system is our next step."

Petter's trip also includes a meeting with Dr. Arthur Pober, president of the entertainment software rating board, which classifies video games for international distribution as well as Web sites. Petter wants to look at the system and determine if it can be adapted to meet the needs of B.C. parents.

"A classification system must give parents the tools they need to make informed decisions about computer and Internet games and products," Petter said. "I'm doing the ground work now because I want to see a classification system in place in as soon as possible."

Petter's action on video-game violence is part of the provincial Turn Off Violence strategy, announced earlier this week, to promote safe communities, safe schools and safe media. The strategy is providing parents, young people, police and communities with the tools they need to stand up to the culture of violence.

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## MINISTRY OF ATTORNEY GENERAL

### B.C. To Take Enforcement Action Against Violent Video Games

Oct. 30, 2000 00:185

VICTORIA - B.C. is moving forward with a two-stage approach to enforce a classification system for violent video games, Attorney General Andrew Petter said today.

"We know that today's families want and need a rating system to help them make informed choices about their children's access to these games," Petter said. "Now, we're putting the tools in place."

As a first step, B.C. will immediately submit to the B.C. Film Classification Office those games that are rated the most violent by the entertainment software rating board. The film classification office recently rated the video game *Soldier of Fortune* as adult, which prohibited the sale or rental of the game to children.

"The entertainment software rating board's system is generally well regarded," said Petter. "Using this system to focus on those games that present the greatest risk to children will enable us to move forward with these enforcement measures now."

Petter said the second step will be to introduce legislation for a more comprehensive system that could also be based on the entertainment software rating board's system, with modifications to reflect B.C. standards and concerns. The modifications could affect terminology, age categories and content descriptors.

"We want to make sure the system is not just adaptable to B.C., but actually reflects community values in this province," said Petter.

In addition to legislation, the attorney general said a major public education campaign is planned to help parents, teachers and children to Web-proof and video-proof themselves.

"B.C. continues to lead the country to turn off violence in our communities, our schools and our media," Petter said. "Now we're taking direct action to keep graphic violence out of the hands of children."

Petter made the announcement after meeting with officials in New York and Washington, D.C., on the marketing and regulation of violent video games.

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September 2000

## BRITISH COLUMBIA'S DISCUSSION PAPER ON VIOLENCE, THE MEDIA AND OUR CHILDREN

British Columbia has recently announced its intention to classify video games and home videos and to regulate their sale and rental. This paper highlights some of the available research on the impacts of media violence and video game violence and the recent action being taken in BC.

There is a growing body of research supporting a correlation between media violence and aggressive behaviour and attitudes in children and youth. Recent indications are that the entertainment industry is targeting the marketing of violent products to youth. BC is calling for a national strategy to address media violence.

Technology is quickly and dramatically changing. Today, the computer provides access to most media and to a vast array of new sources of entertainment – including games, videos and chat-rooms. Tomorrow, all of the options available by satellite, cable, Internet and radio will be available through a single home entertainment unit. The choices will increase exponentially, without limitations save those set by the user.

Technology and the global market for these goods have largely outpaced efforts to influence the production, distribution or content of entertainment. Community values are not always primary concerns, and nations struggle to have an impact on the content of what is seen within their borders. The implications of the advancement of technology have not been fully explored, and the role for government in safeguarding users, particularly children and youth, is complex.

Current industry-sponsored rating systems are fragmented, inconsistent and unenforceable. Those schemes rely on the goodwill of industry and do not provide the necessary clear reference points to community standards upon which parents and users can make informed decisions.

Given the fragmented industry rating system and the increasing levels of violence on TV, home videos and the Internet, BC has decided to act. The Government of British Columbia intends to empower parents and youth with necessary information about video game violence and provide a system of classification and restriction for games and videos that will help them make informed choices.

### The Effects of Media Violence on Children

The wealth of research on children and youth and the effect on them of violence in the media comes from the United States. In July, 2000 the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Psychological Association, the Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychology and the American Medical Association issued a joint statement proclaiming that their findings point overwhelmingly to a strong connection between the violence in video games, home videos, TV shows, movies and



aggressive behaviour. The findings support four decades of research connecting exposure to media violence and aggressive behaviour in children.

As early as 1972, the U.S. Surgeon General reported that children were exposed to a substantial amount of violence on TV, and that they were capable of remembering and learning from this type of material. Early studies showed a significant and consistent correlation between exposure to televised violence and subsequent aggressive behaviour. [U.S. Surgeon General's Report, 1972]

In 1977 in Canada, the *Report of the Ontario Royal Commission on Violence in the Communications Industry* concluded that the great weight of research into the effects of violent media indicates potential harm to society. Its prevalence in the North American intellectual community is compared to potentially dangerous food and drug additives and air or water pollutants such as lead, mercury, and asbestos. [Smith, V. (August 2000). *Media Violence 101: An Introduction to Media Violence*]

Nearly twenty years later, the American Psychological Association Task Force on Television and Society reiterated this position after examining hundreds of experimental and longitudinal studies that indicated high levels of television viewing are correlated with aggressive behavior and the acceptance of aggressive attitudes. [American Psychological Association Task Force on Television and Society, 1992]

A U.S. study in 1995 reported that the viewing patterns children establish as toddlers will influence their viewing habits throughout their lives. [Josephson, (1995). "Television Violence: A Review of the Effects on Children of Different Ages"] The study concluded that:

- At ages three to five, children cannot contextualize violence, but they do behave more aggressively than usual in their play after watching any violent television.
- At ages six to 11, children develop the attention span and cognitive ability to follow continuous plots and to recognize motivations and consequences to characters' actions. They may invest increasingly less mental effort, which means they react to television in an unfocused, superficial way. They can develop a taste for horror movies (perhaps to overcome their own fears) and become desensitized and tolerant of violence in the real world.
- At ages 12 to 17, children are capable of abstract thought but rarely use these abilities when watching television. Interests at this age involve independence, sex and romance, music videos, horror movies, and pornography. Although susceptible to imitating some kinds of television violence, only a small percentage of adolescents will be affected this way.

Research indicates three key ways in which people are affected by media violence:

1. Aggression: those who are exposed to much media violence may become more aggressive. They may develop accepting attitudes about the use of aggression to resolve conflicts.
2. Desensitization: those who watch much media violence may become less sensitive to violence in the real world, less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others, and more willing to tolerate increasing levels of violence in society.
3. Fear: those who watch a lot of violence in the media may perceive the real world to be as threatening as it is on television.

In 1998, Smith & Donnerstein [Smith and Donnerstein, (1998). "Harmful effects of Exposure to Media Violence: Learning of Aggression, Emotional Desensitization, and Fear"] found that the most suggestive images for learning aggression are those that show attractive villains engaging in justified and rewarded violence that do not show any pain or harm to the victims. The risk of desensitization increases from viewing extensive and repeated acts of violence mixed with humor or blood. Depictions involving unjustified acts of aggression that are not punished increase the risk of fear and anxiety in viewers.

In Canada, Laval University's Centre D'étude sur Les Medias released a study in 1999 indicating that violence on Canadian television is growing at an alarming rate: violent acts on television increased 50 per cent between 1995 and 1998. This increase occurred in spite of the fact that the Canadian Association of Broadcasters made a pledge in 1996 to take action on the issue. [Smith, V. (August 2000). *Media Violence 101: An Introduction to Media Violence*]

While violence in the media is not singly responsible for children's aggression, the Canadian Paediatric Society has stated that "the influence of the media on the psychosocial development of children is profound". [Canadian Paediatric Society, (1999). "Children and the Media" (position paper)]

## The Nature of Video Games

Video games are big business. In the United States more than 215 million computer and video games were sold last year alone – that is more than two per household. Sales during the past four years have nearly doubled. [Interactive Digital Software Association]

The majority of studies directly focused on the effects of video games were conducted before advanced technology became available to the gaming public. The first video game in the 1970's was an electronic version of ping-pong. Today games feature realistic characters armed with a variety of weapons engaging in battle, complete with blood, screams, dismemberment and death. Children and youth can select weapons, locations, powers and even the racial orientation of the protagonist.

A study of 650 BC youth conducted by the Media Analysis Laboratory (October 1998) at Simon Fraser University found the following:

- 95 per cent of teens surveyed had access to a home computer or a video game machine, and 90 per cent owned at least some video games;
- 85 per cent of teens said that video games can have a harmful effect on kids. Only 15 per cent thought they had no harmful effect; and,
- Only 5 per cent of the sample said that video games are not addictive.

Violent video games dominate the market. In 1998 a researcher sampled 33 of the most popular video games and found that nearly 80 per cent of the games were violent in nature - 21 per cent portrayed violence towards women. [Dietz, T.L. (1998). "An examination of violence and gender role portrayals in video games: Implications for gender socialization and aggressive behaviour." *Sex Roles*, 38, 425 – 442]

A recent study published in the American Psychological Association [Anderson, C. & Dill, K. (April 2000). "Video Games and Aggressive Thoughts, Feelings and Behaviour in the Laboratory and in Life." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*] found that real-life violent video game play was positively related to aggressive behaviour and delinquency. The study further found that laboratory exposure to a graphically violent video game increased aggressive thoughts and behaviour. These findings lend further support to the mounting evidence that exposure to violent video games will increase aggressive behaviour in both the short term and the long term.

In addition, the exposure to violent videos is exacerbated by advertising targeted at youth. We know that early findings from a U.S. Federal Trade Commission investigation have found that the entertainment industry is targeting its marketing of violent products to children and youth.

The tragedy of youths killing youths in high schools has shocked the world. While there is no doubt that other factors contributed to these attacks, in one case the two killers had customized a version of the video game 'Doom' so that there were two shooters, each with extra weapons and unlimited ammunition, and the victims were unable to fight back. [Ibid] This game became reality for the killers and the students that were trapped in the school.

## The BC Government's Plan – Working with Industry, Parent and Youth

Video games with mature sexual/violent themes are unregulated in Canada and are sold/rented to children and youth without legal restriction. In BC, only video games that feature 'Adult' content - explicit and realistic actions - are subject to regulation under the Motion Picture Act. The BC Film Classification office reviews potentially 'Adult' video games in response to complaints, but has not historically reviewed all video games.

In July, 2000 BC announced its intention to develop and implement a new classification system to inform parents about the content of video games. A working group of public, municipal and industry representatives will advise a provincial working group, including the BC Film Classification Office, on the new classification system and implementation issues.

We know that parents are the best mediators of their children's viewing. Parents can judge their child's maturity level and discuss with them any disturbing images portrayed in the media. However, as children become more and more technologically savvy, they will make choices without their parents' knowledge or consent. The BC Government's intent is to implement a classification system for all video games that allows parents and youth to make informed choices.

Parents must be able to trust that the rating systems used in BC for movies, home videos and video games reflect our own Canadian community standards.

In an effort to provide one harmonized classification system, BC will also classify all home videos. Except for adult videos, all home videos are currently available to be owned or rented by a person of any age, without legal restriction. BC intends to develop a new system to ensure all videos are rated and those rated 18A are not available to children or youth under 19 unless an adult accompanies them.

### Recommendation

In addition to the work we are doing to lead Canada in the classification of video games, the Attorney General of British Columbia is seeking the support of the federal government, the provinces and territories in developing a national strategy on child and youth targeted violence in media. Elements of this strategy would include:

- Cooperation from the federal government, the provinces and the territories to develop a national commitment to video game classification;
- Federal support for research to identify sources and types of offensive violence in child and youth-oriented media;
- Federal leadership in the development of a national public awareness strategy to assist parents, teachers, youth and children in taking appropriate action to reduce the impact of violent media images on children and youth; and,
- Agreement that the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Working Group on Offensive Content on the Internet consider issues of children's and youths' exposure to media violence not only through the Internet but also other convergent media.

Updated: September 7, 2000