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EDITORIAL: Creeping feeling

North Shore News

April 3, 2015 05:00 AM

Back in January, newly elected Saanich mayor Richard Atwell let the world in on a secret — he was probably crackers.

Obviously he must be, because after barely a month on the job, Atwell publicly accused municipal staff — possibly aided by police loyal to his predecessor — of monitoring his every move, particularly his digital moves online.

Denials of online bugging were quickly issued by senior staff and council.

Atwell, for all intents and purposes, became a charter member of the tin foil hat brigade.

But the truth is out there.

Fast forward two months, to this week's damning report from B.C.'s privacy watchdog Elizabeth Denham. Turns out Atwell wasn't crazy. He was right.

The tale told by the privacy commissioner is deeply disturbing — of senior bureaucrats installing software specifically set up to spy on political leaders and to secretly capture personal information, including keystrokes, emails and screen shots every 30 seconds. It also captured the personal information of all citizens who corresponded with them.

The software was installed illegally, in complete violation of privacy rights and — tellingly — one day after Atwell was sworn in.

We say, draw your own conclusions.

What happened in Saanich is both shocking and creepy.

Beyond Saanich, the watchdog's report should be a wake-up call about privacy rights in general — particularly those in the workplace.

Disturbingly, the tale only came to light after an IT employee with ethical qualms tipped off Atwell. It's a poor reflection that most others in this sorry saga checked their own ethics at the door.

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