5   THE FINE PRINT (Policy)

Within the Department of External Affairs, policies and procedures have been put into place to satisfy several criteria. Central agencies such as Treasury Board and DSS have requirements that need to be met, acquisitions must conform to overall departmental policy, costs must be disclosed, standards maintained, and support be made available. The following are the salient points regarding departmental computer policy.

5.1   Background

Microcomputers are a very recent technological development, having appeared on the scene less than 10 years ago. Since the introduction of the IBM-PC in 1981, micros have become a commonplace business tool. The latest figures indicate that there are approximately 30 million MS-DOS micros now in use in North America. It is said that the computing power of these micros now exceeds the total mini and mainframe computing capability on the entire planet. As micros proliferate, two trends have emerged that are of significant interest to this Department.

First, although micros today have the power of the million-dollar mainframe of 20 years ago, the cost of a single workstation can still approach that of a small car. One can appreciate that, with over 1000 systems presently in the Department, the collective dollar cost is quite significant. Therefore, several basic groundrules have been developed to protect this sizable investment, and the Department's interests.

Second, control and responsibility issues have changed radically with the introduction of microcomputers. The following quotation will shed some light on this.

> "A significant difference between the usage of large computers and small systems is that the responsibility and operation of the large computers is assigned to the management of the data centre while small system users have total control of and responsibility for all aspects of the system operation. *Personnel using small computer systems usually do not have an EDP or information processing background and thus are often not aware of the vulnerabilities associated with the use of small systems. Consequently, sensitive data on small systems may be inadequately cared for and protected.*

> Users of large computers have in the past been protected, as the implementation of safeguards, such as the backup and recovery of data files, was the responsibility of the data centre personnel. Also, theft of large systems or related peripherals, such as disks and tapes, are infrequent due primarily to the physical size of these systems as well as physical access controls implemented at a majority of data centres. With the proliferation of computers in the office and the home, small systems are exposed to a new type of threat. The threat of theft of the system components and media (diskettes and hard disks) is motivated not by the data contained thereon but by the value and attractiveness of the hardware itself. Another concern associated with the use of small systems, especially those interconnected via a network, is the difficulty in controlling the unauthorized expansibility of hardware and software products which may compromise, either accidentally or deliberately, the security of the system or network. When using small computer systems, the users themselves are required to perform all system maintenance functions, including the security of the system and the data stored thereon. *Consequently, it is imperative that users be educated not only in the use of the systems but also in the importance of proper security procedures*"

> from RCMP Security Evaluation and Inspection Team (SEIT) (italics ours)