Several laptop computers have been stolen from the Dublin offices of Irish energy company Bord Gáis, one of which contained the personal data of 100,000 Bord Gáis customers. It has been confirmed that customers’ bank account details and other information relating to customers who took part in the Bord Gáis ‘Big Switch’ electricity campaign were stored on the unencrypted laptop.

Bord Gáis reported the theft of its laptops to the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner immediately upon discovery. The organisation has also notified affected individuals. This is despite there being currently no explicit mandatory requirement for data controllers to notify either the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner or affected individuals of losses of their personal data.

The Data Protection Commissioner Billy Hawkes has made it clear on previous occasions that he considers it good practice for organisations to notify their data breaches, and has published guidance on this issue (see www.dataprotection.ie).

When asked for his comment on the incident, Mr Hawkes told Data Protection Ireland “I encourage organisations to inform my Office of the loss of personal data. The key issue is to ensure that data subjects, where appropriate, are informed so that they can be fully aware of the potential uses that may be made of their personal data or that sensitive confidential data about them may become known to other people.

“By informing my Office we can work with organisations to ensure appropriate steps are taken to prevent such issues occurring in future.

“On a broader level I would appeal to all organisations to examine their procedures for

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