



# **16<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories**

## **Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures**

Report on the Use of  
Laptop Computers and  
Blackberry Devices in the  
Legislative Assembly

Chair: Mr. Robert Hawkins, MLA

**MEMBERS OF THE  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
RULES AND PROCEDURES**

---

Robert Hawkins  
MLA Yellowknife Centre  
Chair

Kevin Menicoche  
MLA Nahendeh  
Deputy Chair

Wendy Bisaro  
MLA Frame Lake

Jane Groenewegen  
MLA Hay River South

Hon. Robert R. McLeod  
MLA Yellowknife South

**COMMITTEE  
STAFF**

Gail Bennett  
Committee Clerk

Gay Kennedy  
Committee Researcher

February 11, 2009

SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Speaker:

Your Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures is pleased to provide its Report on the Use of Laptop Computers and Blackberry Devices in the Legislative Assembly and commends it to the House.

Robert Hawkins, MLA  
Chairperson

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
RULES AND PROCEDURES**

**REPORT ON THE USE OF  
LAPTOP COMPUTERS AND  
BLACKBERRY DEVICES IN THE  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

---

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Introduction .....	1
Practices in Other Legislative Assemblies .....	1
The Purpose of Laptops and Blackberries .....	1
Recommendation 1 .....	2
Recommendation 2 .....	2
Recommendation 3 .....	2
Appendix A: Referring Correspondence from Board of Management	
Appendix B: Table 1: Use of Laptops and Blackberry-type Devices Across Canada	

## **STANDING COMMITTEE ON RULES AND PROCEDURES**

### **REPORT ON THE USE OF LAPTOP COMPUTERS AND BLACKBERRY DEVICES IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Members of the Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures met several times to discuss the use of laptop computers and Blackberry-type devices in the Assembly and Committee meetings. The discussions were initiated after the Board of Management of the Legislative Assembly referred the question about the use of laptop computers and Blackberry-type devices to the Standing Committee for recommendations. The referring letter is attached as Appendix A.

#### **PRACTICES IN OTHER LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLIES**

The practices in Legislative Assemblies across Canada were reviewed and are presented in Table 1, attached as Appendix B. It is evident that the use of laptop computers and Blackberry-type devices varies widely. It is also evident that the use of laptop computers in Legislative Assemblies has greatly increased over the last several years.

#### **THE PURPOSE OF LAPTOPS AND BLACKBERRIES**

Many Members consider their laptops and/or their Blackberries as tools that allow them to work in a more efficient and effective manner. They want to prepare their notes on computers. They want to refer to documents and calendars on their laptops and Blackberries. The use of laptops can support a reduction in the use of paper copies and an increasing use of e-documents in both the Assembly and Standing Committees.

For many Members, the use of Blackberries is considered to be similar to the use of cell phones. Members acknowledge that they cannot engage in conversations on their cell or Blackberry in the Assembly or Committee meetings and the device has to be set on vibrating or silent mode. The use of any communication device cannot be disruptive or distracting to other Members.

The move toward the increased use of laptops in Committees and/or the Assembly would require the installation of additional technical infrastructure in Committee rooms and the Legislative Assembly Chamber, in order to support network and internet connections.

The move towards increased use of e-documents in Committees and/or the Assembly would also require the development of new operational procedures, such as SharePoint websites, to support access and maintain confidentiality of some documents.

### **Recommendation 1**

The Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures recommends that Members be permitted to use laptops during Committee of the Whole proceedings for the winter 2009 Session only, after which their use will be evaluated. Communication devices cannot be used by a Member who has the floor. A Member who has the floor must have his laptop closed.

### **Recommendation 2**

The Standing Committee recommends that the Board of Management and the Office of the Clerk examine the issues related to:

- a) The purchase of laptop computers for Members;
- b) Planning and installation of additional infrastructure to support the connections; and
- c) Planning for the changes to operational procedures and websites, etc., to support the increased use of e-documents in Committees and the Assembly and return with a plan and schedule to develop and implement the changes.

**Recommendation 3**

The Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures recommends to other Standing Committees that:

- a) The use of Blackberries be permitted in a manner similar to cell phones; that is, disruption of Members' activities is not allowed;
- b) The use of laptops be permitted; and
- c) Committee staff be permitted to use laptops.

**APPENDIX B**

<p align="center"><b>TABLE 1</b> USE OF LAPTOPS AND BLACKBERRY-TYPE DEVICES ACROSS CANADA</p>				
Local	Laptops	PDA's (Blackberry)	Funding Source	Notes
House of Commons	Allowed: Network, email, internal website, Parliament site.	Allowed, so long as it does not disrupt		Speaker has reminded Members to turn off their phones in the House.
Senate	No ruling by Speaker, little support.	Allowed		
Alberta	Allowed	Allowed, so long as it does not disrupt	Assembly provides laptops. PDA's are from constituency budget.	Not during Question Period or ceremonial occasions.
Quebec	Allowed		Assembly provides laptops	Tolerated during Routine Proceedings
Newfoundland and Labrador	Allowed	Allowed	BlackBerries provided by Assembly, anything else is from constituency allowance.	



Local	Laptops	PDA's (Blackberry)	Funding Source	Notes
Nova Scotia	Allowed	Allowed	Constituency allowance	May not be used during Oral Questions.
Prince Edward Island	Allowed	Allowed	Assembly provides leased laptop.	Connection to internet or network is permitted after Oral Question Period.
New Brunswick	Allowed only in Committee of the Whole	No guidelines, but have been tolerated	Constituency Allowance	
Manitoba	Allowed	Allowed	Constituency Allowance	Not allowed during Question period
Saskatchewan	Allowed	Allowed	Constituency Allowance	May not be used by a Member who has the floor.
Nunavut	No	No		