



16th Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures

Report on the Use of
Laptop Computers and
Hand-Held Electronic Devices
in the Legislative Assembly

Chair: Mr. Robert Hawkins, MLA

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May 19, 2010

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 Hand-Held Electronic Devices in the Legislative Assembly and commends it to the House.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Hawkins".

Robert Hawkins, MLA
Chairperson

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
RULES AND PROCEDURES**

**REPORT ON THE USE OF
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IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
RULES AND PROCEDURES**

**REPORT ON THE USE OF
LAPTOP COMPUTERS AND
HAND-HELD ELECTRONIC DEVICES
IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

The Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures tabled Committee Report 3-16(3): Report on the Use of Laptop Computers and Blackberry Devices, in the Legislative Assembly on February 11, 2009. This was the first report to examine a number of issues pertaining to the use of portable electronic devices by Members of the Assembly and Committee staff in the performance of their duties. The report reviewed the practices in other jurisdictions as well as the purpose of portable communication devices. The Report recommended that Members be allowed to use laptop computers during Committee of the Whole proceedings for the Winter 2009 sitting of the House and that an evaluation of laptop usage take place at the conclusion of that sitting. This recommendation was accepted by the House, with Committee Motion 3-16(3) being adopted on February 19, 2009. Committee Motion 3-16(3) also stated that communication devices cannot be used by a Member who has the floor and that a Member who has the floor must have his or her laptop computer closed.

At the conclusion of the Winter 2009 sitting, the Committee contacted each Member of the Assembly to solicit their opinion on the use of portable communication devices. The Committee tabled Committee Report 8-16(3) on June 1, 2009, and on the same date Committee Motion 49-16(3) was adopted in Committee of the Whole. This motion allowed for the continued use of laptop computers during Committee of the Whole proceedings for the balance of the 2009 calendar year and called for a further evaluation in 2010. It should be noted that the use of electronic devices continued to be prohibited by any Member who had the floor.

On May 26, 2009, the Chair of the Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures, Mr. Robert Hawkins, introduced the matter at Caucus for further consultation. Direction from Caucus indicated that Members agreed with the use of laptop computers and other hand-held communication devices during Committee of the Whole proceedings. Members also agreed that portable communication devices were not to be used by a Member who has the floor and that a Member who has the floor must have his or her laptop computer closed.

Following the direction provided by Caucus, Committee Members then reviewed the rules governing the use of laptop computers and other electronic devices in

other jurisdictions. The results of this review are attached as Appendix A to this report. In Canada, ten of thirteen legislatures allow the use of portable electronic devices during some part of their proceedings.

As a result of the reviews and consultations with Members, the Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures respectfully makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1

The Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures recommends that Members be permitted to use laptop computers and other hand-held electronic devices only during Committee of the Whole proceedings;

And further, that laptop computers and other hand-held electronic communication devices are not be used by a Member who has the floor;

And furthermore, that a Member who has the floor must have his or her laptop computer closed and/or his or her hand-held electronic device turned off.

Recommendation 2

The Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures recommends that any electronic device used in the Chamber must be on silent mode at all times.

Recommendation 3

The Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures recommends that the use of laptop computers and hand-held electronic devices continue to be administered through the sole discretion of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly or the Chair of Committee of the Whole and if the use of any electronic device is deemed to impinge on the decorum or dignity of the House, the offending Member may be ordered to discontinue use.

Recommendation 4

The Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures recommends that the guidelines governing the use of laptop computers and hand-held electronic devices be set out in a document entitled "Direction Regarding the Use of Electronic Communication Devices in Committee of the Whole" and that the document be attached as an appendix to the Rules of the Legislative Assembly.

APPENDIX A

**RULES REGARDING LAPTOPS OR BLACKBERRYS
IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS**

Jurisdiction	Rules
PEI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laptop and other devices, such as Blackberrys permitted in the Assembly except during ceremonial occasions such as Speech from the Throne. • Use is at sole discretion of the Speaker or the Chair and if use is deemed to impinge on the decorum or dignity of the House, the Member may be ordered to discontinue use. • In 2002 use of laptops in committees was not permitted – issue has not been revisited.
Newfoundland and Labrador	<p>Provisional guidelines established by Speaker :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electronic devices must be used in silent mode at all times (includes Blackberrys). • Electronic devices shall not be used for consultation purposes while a Member has the floor. • Electronic devices shall not be used during routine proceedings. • Electronic devices shall not be used on ceremonial occasions. • Electronic devices shall not be used during discussions of Points of Order, Points of Privilege, during Speaker’s rulings, votes and divisions.
Nova Scotia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The only restriction is that no electronic device shall be used during question period. • The use of Blackberrys as cell phones would not be permitted at any time as cell phone use is prohibited at all times.
New Brunswick	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laptops may be used in the Chamber during Committee of the Whole proceedings only. • Blackberrys have been largely tolerated by the Speaker and other Chairs. Blackberrys left on have interfered with Assembly sound system.
House of Commons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use allowed but must not be disruptive.
Senate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laptop or Blackberry that does not produce sound can be used in the Chamber. Blackberrys are also regularly used in committees.

Jurisdiction	Rules
Ontario	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of any electronic device explicitly prohibited. Laptops may never be used but Blackberrys have been overlooked by the Speaker if unobtrusive. Speaker has authority to disallow use at any time. • In committees, Members may use Blackberrys on same basis as use in the House. Laptops may also be used at the Chair's discretion.
Manitoba	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blackberrys and laptops can be used in Chamber and committee in silent mode, with the exception of use during oral questions.
Saskatchewan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blackberrys, laptops permitted in Assembly and committee provided they are operated silently and not used as a telephone.
Alberta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blackberrys, laptops permitted in Chamber except during question period or on ceremonial occasions. • Use of any/all audio capabilities is not permitted in the Chamber. • Use of any recording device, camera or pager (stand alone or as part of laptop, blackberry, etc.) is not permitted. • Members must ensure that all laptops and other devices are muted while in the Chamber. • Members have access to Assembly network services.
British Columbia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since Jan. 2002, laptop use is permitted in the Chamber. This includes Blackberrys. • Use extends to committee rooms. • Must be in silent mode. • Must preserve the decorum of the House and committee. • May not be used by a Member who has the floor. • Not allowed during certain routine proceedings. • On trial basis, Ministry officials who may be present during Committee of the Whole are authorized to use Blackberrys but not laptops.
Yukon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use not permitted.
Nunavut	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use not permitted.
Western Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be used but must not disrupt the House.