

NEWSNATIONAL

Cutbacks reduce revenue agency's nine libraries to one



The Canadian Revenue Agency's headquarters in Ottawa. PHOTO: CHRIS MIKULA/POSTMEDIA NEWS/FILE

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Jason Fekete, Ottawa Citizen

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OTTAWA — The Canada Revenue Agency has consolidated nine internal libraries into one research centre, as the closing of federal libraries extends to several government departments and raises more questions about the potential destruction of decades' worth of materials and knowledge.

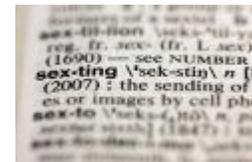
Much as Environment Canada and Fisheries and Oceans have shuttered a number of their libraries, the CRA has closed most of its Knowledge and Research Centres and consolidated the nine facilities into a single site based in Halifax. The centres were not public libraries, but provided library research services to CRA employees.

A number of materials have been moved to the remaining library and other items were digitized, says the CRA,

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although many materials were also disposed of in the process.

The CRA previously had nine physical libraries: in Halifax, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, North York, Mississauga, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver. They were consolidated into the one current location in Halifax in the 2012-13 fiscal year, the CRA says.

However, the agency says it continues to have "research specialist teams" in Montreal, Ottawa, the Greater Toronto Area, Edmonton, Calgary and Vancouver who use electronic research databases and other tools to digitally deliver research to CRA employees.

The CRA is cutting \$313 million annually and more than 3,100 full-time positions by 2017-18, and agency officials say the libraries were shuttered as part of an effort to save taxpayer dollars.

"The CRA determined that the modernization of the Knowledge and Research Program would be more cost effective and let the CRA move to an electronic solution where electronic specialized tax research services are delivered to the CRA employees' desktop," CRA spokesperson Mylène Croteau said in an email.

During its library closings, the CRA inventoried print and multimedia materials from the nine locations and identified duplicates. Materials with "historical significance (corporate memory) and residual and current research value" were moved to the research collection in Halifax, the agency says.

They were then offered to other government departments and Library and Archives Canada. Any remaining items were then "disposed of using the appropriate disposition policies and guidelines," Croteau said.

Fragile and unique materials at the centralized research collection in Halifax have been identified and will be digitized in future, the agency said.



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Jason Fekete, Ottawa Citizen

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The CRA's library closings are just part of a government-wide effort to shutter libraries, consolidate materials in fewer locations and dispose of items deemed unnecessary. For example, Environment Canada and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans are closing and consolidating their science libraries — a trend that worries some observers who say valuable books and other materials are being lost.

Opposition parties say the library closings at some departments are part of the Conservative government's "war on science."

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