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## Fury over inquiry's loss of top secret disc

By Diana Rusk

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Lost files : Rosemary Nelson inquiry controversy

A COMPUTER disc lost by the inquiry team investigating the murder of Lurgan solicitor Rosemary Nelson contained top-secret information about informants and their handlers.

There are fears that lives could be put at risk if the highly sensitive material – now missing for more than 10 days – gets into the wrong hands.

The Irish News has learned that the disc contains a database of names of handlers from a range of security agencies as well as coded details of informants relating to the Nelson case.

The agencies are not believed to have been aware of its existence and were only informed it had gone missing in recent days.

Top-level meetings have been held about the bungle and some of those affected are reported to be furious that the database was ever created.

After being contacted by The Irish News yesterday the inquiry team released a public statement confirming “personal and protectively marked material” was discovered lost on May 6.

It is understood much of the information was classified as ‘secret’, but collectively the database was given the highest security classification.

A source said the files contained “extremely sensitive material that could put lives at risk”.

“It is appalling that it was ever made and disgraceful that it has gone missing,” the source said.

The news will come as a blow to the inquiry and raises questions about the transfer of secret information in future.

It was set up to investigate whether authorities played any role in the death of Mrs Nelson, above, (40) in a loyalist car bomb in 1999 and has the power to probe agencies including MI5, the RUC and the British army.

The statement from the inquiry team said it had worked closely with police to ensure any risk to individuals "has been assessed and minimised at the earliest opportunity" and that the incident was being investigated.

It said the disc was not believed to have been stolen.

"The inquiry has been advised that there are currently no grounds to suspect that there will be any adverse consequences as a result of this loss," the statement said.

"The inquiry deeply regrets this serious breach of secure-data-handling protocols within the inquiry.

Immediate steps have been taken to avoid any recurrence and a comprehensive review of all aspects of data handling has been initiated.

"The inquiry is determined that the incident should not in any way compromise or impede its investigation into the circumstances of the death of Rosemary Nelson."

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