Secure Your Home PC—for Free!

Do you have a computer in your home? Do you use it to check email or access the Internet?
If so, you need to protect it from hackers, viruses, worms, and other malicious attackers.

There are four basic security tools every computer that connects to the Internet should have:

     1. An Internet Firewall
     2. Antivirus Software
     3. Regularly run "Windows Update" (Windows 2000, ME, or XP can do automatically)
     4. "Spyware" detection and removal software.

Fortunately, there are companies who, in the name of good "*netizenship*," will help home users
protect themselves with some free software tools. Here's who they are and how to get the tools.

**NOTE: This is intended as a basic guide illustrating some effective practices and some of
the tools available to home PC users. Sinclair Community College does not endorse, or
offer technical support for, any of the software or vendors listed in this article.**

Internet Firewall

The purpose of a firewall is essentially to block unwanted Internet traffic from your PC. If you
use Windows XP, it has a built-in basic firewall, all you need to do is make sure it is turned on
(sse Windows XP 'help' files). For other versions of Windows, a good software firewall is
ZoneAlarm, available from www.zonelabs.com. While their premium products are very
effective and well worth the cost, especially for the advanced PC user, the free version they offer
is effective for most users. To obtain the software, click on the link "ZoneAlarm (free)" on the
Zone Labs home page. Follow the instructions for download and installation. (The default
program settings are adequate for most users.)

Antivirus Software

Anti-virus software detects and prevents known viruses and other malicious code from infecting
your system. It is only effective against the viruses in the "signature file", so it must be updated
frequently (**Recommendation: Update your signature files at least daily**).
If you are a Sinclair Community College employee, you can install McAfee Antivirus software
free of charge. CDs are available for check-out from the LRC circulation desk. Details and
instructions can be found on the ITS Department Policy and Procedures page
http://our.sinclair.edu/sites/its/itswebsite/it_policies/procedures/mcafee/mcafee.htm.

If you are not an employee, or don't want to use McAfee, one of the major antivirus software
vendors, **Grisoft** (www.grisoft.com), offers a good "free" AV tool. It offers a free version to
"single-seat" home users, **AVG Free** doesn't allow scheduled scanning and full scans must be
triggered manually, but it does scan email and downloaded files "on-demand". It is available for
download from www.grisoft.com. Users have to complete a survey and submit a valid email
address to obtain an activation key.

On-Line AntiVirus Scan

Recommended: After downloading AVG, (or other AV software) *but before installing it*,

Visit **Trend Micro** and run their free on-line virus scanner http://housecall.trendmicro.com/ to ensure the PC is virus-free before installing any new software. Some viruses actually prevent antivirus software from installing or scanning properly. (Trend Micro also sells an excellent Anti-virus product and security suite, PC-cillin).

Windows Update
Windows Update is the tool Microsoft provides to keep Windows software updated with the latest security patches. As long as you have an Internet connection and Internet Explorer browser, you can run this tool. <u>You should run Windows Update *at least* once a week</u>.
> From the Internet Explorer browser toolbar, click Tools, then Windows Update
> (you may be prompted to install software from Microsoft...click "yes" or OK)
> After the page loads, click the "Scan for Updates" link.
> You should install all "Critical Updates" found during the scan, including 'SP2' if you
> are using Windows XP (Home PCs only, do not install SP2 on SCC systems).

If you are using Windows 2000, ME, or XP, you can set your PC to automate the Windows Update process. Instructions are different for each version of Windows and are available on the Microsoft Security Web site http://www.microsoft.com/security/articles/swupdates.asp.

Spyware
Spyware is a generic—and controversial—term for software that collects information about you and transmits this information to its "home" vendor. Some spyware is harmless or even marginally beneficial as it simply tracks your Internet use habits to deliver targeted advertising; this allows some Web sites to remain free of charge. However, illicit spyware is a threat that is growing and has the potential to cause damage or steal personal information. As a minimum, users should occasionally scan their systems and eliminate any unwanted spyware. A free tool to do this is Ad-Aware SE, available from http://www.lavasoftusa.com/. Another good spyware detector is SpyBot S&D (Search & Destroy) available from http://www.safer-networking.org. Be very careful to type the URL (Web Address) exactly as above because some spyware companies use very similar addresses to trick the unsuspecting into installing spyware instead of spyware removers!

The Internet-based threats to your PC are real—and growing—but they do not outweigh the benefits of the access to information and communication offered (and, of course, shopping!). With a little effort, understanding and practicing basic Information Security habits, and by using the free tools listed above, you can not only "surf" more safely and privately, but also help prevent your PC from being used to help generate the next malicious code *tsunami* on the Internet.

Dan O'Callaghan, CISSP
CISO
Sinclair Community College