

Anti-Spyware Tip Sheet

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What is Spyware?

Spyware is the term we use for code that tracks your computer activity and sends it back to some server somewhere. Spyware data collection falls into three basic categories:

- **Adware.** This is relatively benign spyware. Companies track your activities on the Internet and present you with advertisements that appeal to you. On the less-benign side of things, these programs can also lead to more pop-ups and unwanted email advertising (spam).
- Data farming — or “**Phishing.**” Phishing and Pharming are the cute little names given to the process of collecting your private information for purposes of stealing from you. The least serious offenses consist of collecting email addresses, user names, and passwords. On the more evil side of the spectrum you’ll find programs that collect birthdays, social security numbers, loan numbers, and other data used to steal your identity (identity theft).
- **Remote Control** or Trojan Horse programs. Trojans, as they’re called, are programs that turn your computer into a “zombie” that does the bidding of other computer. This might include scanning for personal data on your network or sending out spam on behalf of the evil master computer.



Current estimates are that almost 10% of the traffic on the Internet consists of spyware calling “home.” Combine that with the fact that 90% of email traffic on the internet is spam, and you have a lot of wasted resources!

How Do You Get Spyware?

Unfortunately, spyware is very easy to catch. Some forms arrive by email. Others you have to click on something. Some is installed simply because you visit the wrong web site.

Anyone can get spyware anytime. But, as a general rule, the more you wander around the Internet clicking on everything you see, the more likely you are to get spyware. Spyware is almost always disguised as something else. After all, who’s going to click on a link that says “Give your personal data so we can sell it and ruin your credit”?

Some spyware comes attached to little programs that are supposed to make your life easier, like weather reporting tools or contact managers.

What Can You Do About Spyware?

- Find, install, and use a good **Anti-Spyware program**. One of the best right now is Microsoft’s Anti-Spyware tool. It is currently free and can be downloaded at www.microsoft.com/athome/security/spyware/software
- Do Not click on links that arrive in your email. Instead, go your Internet browser and type in the link. That way, if it’s legitimate, **you** initiated the contact.
- Just like viruses, you are most likely to get spyware by email. In second place is the web. Be careful and think before you click! If something asks you to install code, and you weren’t expecting that, click NO.