

PROTECT YOUR COMPUTER FROM THE NASTIES

(updated September 15, 2008)

Crackers (the bad guys) are constantly trying to find ways to violate the security barrier that you have established (or think you have established) to protect your system and data files from viruses, Trojan horses, worms, dialers, and various kinds of spyware. This list will show you where to find a number of free programs that will go a long way in protecting your privacy and security.

The Culprits Defined:

Virus: A program or piece of code that is loaded onto your computer without your knowledge and runs against your wishes. Viruses can also replicate themselves. All computer viruses are man-made. A simple virus that can make a copy of itself over and over again is relatively easy to produce. Even such a simple virus is dangerous because it will quickly use all available memory and bring your system to a halt. An even more dangerous type of virus is one capable of transmitting itself across networks and bypassing security systems.

Trojan: Trojan Horses or Backdoors open your PC from the inside to attackers. Once a Trojan is installed, someone can take full control of your computer. Most Trojans are delivered via email and just previewing the email can activate the Trojan.

Dialer: Dialers are small programs which reconfigure your dial-up number to dial a premium rate number without your knowledge, either at night or when your computer is idle. If you use a dial-up modem to connect to your Internet Service Provider you are at risk. Premium rate numbers can cost you hundreds in just a few days!

Worm: Worms are the most wide-spread hazard on the Internet. Worms arrive as emails with harmful attachments. If you open an attachment the worm will then copy and send itself to as many other computers as possible, damaging yours and your friend's systems.

Spyware: Your personal data and your habits are a goldmine for some advertising companies who seek to infiltrate your computer. Often you are not aware that a spyware program has been downloaded. This software can collect personal information about you and your Internet habits, change your home page and even stop you from accessing some websites.

According to Fred Langa, recognized as one of the world's foremost experts in computing and information technology, if you have installed on your computer one good firewall (Zone Alarm), one good antivirus tool (AVG or Avast4Home), and one good real-time anti-malware tool (Microsoft's Defender) you will intercept and destroy almost everything. Add in protection from SpywareBlaster and a startup monitor (StartUpMonitor) and periodic scans from tools like Ad-Aware, Spybot S&D, ThreatFire, and Glary and you'll be locked down about as well as you can be.

Check out your free options below. With one exception, all are available at absolutely no cost!

According to many experts, you should have a "cocktail" of anti-spyware programs installed on your computer, including ALL of these.

SpywareBlaster. Although today's free antispyware apps are getting better at preventing spyware infections, their main focus remains on identifying and removing spyware after the threats infect your computer. However, Javacool Software's SpywareBlaster works primarily on the prevention side, blocking spyware-related threats from installing and executing.

<http://tinyurl.com/3vcux>

Spybot Search & Destroy. If you need an effective, no-frills, spywarescanning app that can identify and remove most threats, Spybot Search & Destroy is a wise choice. In addition to basic scanning tools that target cookies, Internet dialers, browser hijackers, keyloggers, Trojans, and other malware, Spybot S&D features immunization tools for Internet Explorer that help block suspicious plug-ins and other downloads. Spybot S&D also provides a wealth of fine-tuning options that let you alter the way the program scans and removes spyware.

<http://tinyurl.com/2b7s7>

Ad-Aware. Long regarded as a trusted ally in the war against spyware, Lavasoft's Ad-Aware program remains an effective tool for identifying and removing threats. This free utility is now better than ever, featuring a scanning engine that scours extended memory (including modules loaded by processes) and can even identify new and unknown variants.

<http://tinyurl.com/5kgs1>

CWS shredder: The best defense against malware that tries to hijack your browser. <http://tinyurl.com/pgxct>

Bazooka Adware and Spyware Scanner detects a multitude of spyware, adware, Trojan horses, keyloggers, and trackware components. The scanning process only takes a fraction of a second and tells you how to uninstall the invasive spyware or puts you in contact with the spyware developer for the most up-to-date and safe uninstall instructions. Spyware and adware often are bundled with other software and in many cases are installed without your knowledge. Some send information about your surfing habits to ad companies, which target you with pop-up ads that fit your preferences.

<http://tinyurl.com/9bxnz>

Microsoft Windows Defender. Previously known as Microsoft AntiSpyware, Windows Defender is the antispyware tool that appears automatically in the Microsoft's Vista operating system; however, the program is freely available to any WinXP SP2 or SP3 user. This utility features a basic but slick interface that's easy to navigate and understand, in addition to a powerful scanner that catches a wide range of threats. As Windows Defender identifies such threats, the program alerts users with pop-up messages that indicate suspicious activity.

<http://tinyurl.com/dyvaw>

The Microsoft Windows Malicious Software Removal Tool checks computers running Windows XP or Vista for infections by specific, prevalent malicious software and helps remove any infection found. When the detection and removal process is complete, the tool displays a report describing the outcome, including which, if any, malicious software was detected and removed. Microsoft releases an updated version of this tool on the second Tuesday of each month. New versions are available through the Microsoft Download Center at:

<http://tinyurl.com/5lyxe>

Glary Utilities: to Keep Your System in Tip-Top Shape. Users who are looking for an effective and easy-to-use application to keep their system in tip-top shape should try this one out. C/NET editors give this program (added August 22, 2008) a four star rating. This powerful application offers extensive utilities to improve your system's performance and protect your privacy. Its well-organized interface allows users to easily choose from several tools. It cleans unwanted junk files and removes invalid and broken shortcuts, freeing up valuable disk space.

Its Registry cleaner allows you to scan, remove, and back up faulty Registry entries. You also can wipe out online and Windows traces, although Internet Explorer is the only browser in which this function is supported. To improve the speed of your computer, it offers tools to manage start-up programs and memory optimization. Privacy-conscious users will certainly appreciate its inclusion of a government-standard file shredder to securely delete data.

<http://www.glaryutilities.com/gu.html?tag=download>

Spyware Terminator. If you're looking for a straightforward and simple-to-use anti-spyware tool, give Spyware Terminator a try. Not only does it scan your system for spyware and remove it, but unlike some other free anti-spyware software, it also stops you from getting infected in the first place. Scans are fast and easy to customize, and you can create ignore lists, and can put potential infections into a quarantine before deleting them. The real-time protection includes a variety of shields for protection against several types of dangers. This program is an August 2008 addition to PC World's recommended downloads.

<http://tinyurl.com/6rhlmh>

Most experts agree that you should never have more than one antivirus program running on your computer. Install only one of these. (If you are a Cox Internet client and have the McAfee Security Suite installed, you will not need another anti-virus program.)

Cox Security Suite by McAfee. The McAfee Security Suite, available at no extra cost to Cox Internet clients, offers customers protection with these features: **Anti-Virus:** Blocks and removes viruses and even stops them before they ever get to your PC. **Anti-Spyware:** Blocks spyware and removes existing spyware before it installs on your computer. **Anti-**

Phishing via SiteAdvisor: When browsing, a small button in browser toolbar changes color based on the SiteAdvisor safety results. When searching with popular search engines like Google, Yahoo!, MSN, AOL or Ask.com, SiteAdvisor safety ratings appear next to search results. **Firewall:** Intelligent firewall protection monitors your Internet traffic and alerts you of suspicious applications. **Parental (Grandparent) Controls:** Protects children online by filtering offensive content, pictures and websites. **Identity Protection:** Ability to monitor your outgoing Internet traffic and ask permission before personal information -- including PINs, bank accounts, SSNs and family names -- is sent from your PC. Complete instructions for downloading the program are available at:

<http://scscc.com/bkk/CoxMcAfeeSecuritySuite.pdf>

AVG Anti-Virus Free Edition. Although you'll get a fraction of the features found in AVG Professional, Grisoft's AVG Anti-Virus Free Edition still leaves you with a reliable utility that catches practically all viruses— with no hassle. Regular updates keep this program constantly on top of the latest threats, and automatic scanning makes sure your system is clean, even if you forget to use the scanner. A rudimentary interface provides quick access to scanning and resident shield options, including email scanning, as well as other tools.

<http://tinyurl.com/czbxm>

AntiVir PersonalEdition Classic. With the ability to detect and remove more than 80,000 viruses, Avira's AntiVir provides solid protection against most of today's viral beasts. AntiVir even protects against previously unknown viruses using heuristic detection, which watches for virus-like patterns to catch new malware. Through its System Tray icon, the utility's on-access scanner provides an instant view of its current status, including the name of the last file it scanned.

<http://www.free-av.com>.

avast! 4 Home Edition. This free, feature-packed utility integrates elements typically found in premium products, including Web Shield, which monitors and filters HTTP (Hypertext Transfer Protocol) traffic for malware, and Network Shield, which works on systems using Windows XP to protect against Internet-based attacks such as worms. The avast! 4 home program's resident

protection offers multiple settings to fine-tune your antivirus environment exactly as you see fit, including email options for scanning various protocols and a separate plug-in for Microsoft Outlook.

<http://tinyurl.com/h4akm>

Web-Based Anti-Virus Program. To double-check the effectiveness of your one onboard antivirus program, use a free Web-based antivirus program such as HouseCall. Since this program is Web-based, it can be used as a complement to your installed anti-virus program.

<http://tinyurl.com/23noow>

ThreatFire Anti-Virus Free Edition. Called CyberHawk under its previous owners, PC Tools' ThreatFire is a useful program but only in limited situations. It offers real-time prevention of virus and malware infections by identifying suspicious behaviors ("zero-day" events) as they happen, before malicious code installs itself on your PC. However, ThreatFire does not offer an on-demand scan for viruses already on your computer, though it will perform an on-demand scan for other malware. The name says "antivirus", but if you're looking for an all-in-one on-demand bug killer C/Net recommends looking for a product that includes both on-demand virus scanning and real-time protection.

ThreatFire does do some things very well. The software real-time protection didn't noticeably slow down a Windows Vista computer, and the customizable advanced settings were excellent. Users can pick and choose their preferred trusted processes and create rules for detection, such as scanning for SCR files created by an email client. You can also avail yourself of the scheduler, and create a system restore point before moving threats into quarantine.

However, once installed, ThreatFire is difficult to remove from your startup routine without uninstalling it. The absence of on-demand virus scanning means that this app is best used in conjunction with a program that offers on-demand virus detection and removal (for example, one of the anti-virus programs listed immediately above.) While ThreatFire offers some compelling features, competing freeware security programs provide a more comprehensive combination of real-time and on-demand virus scanning.

<http://tinyurl.com/5zlk22>

Have only one software firewall running on your system. (If you are a Cox Internet client with McAfee Security Suite installed, you will not need a firewall.)

ZoneAlarm. This well-known, trusted firewall from Zone Labs continues to be a popular choice among home users, thanks to its wealth of options, ease of use, and free price tag. In addition to basic firewall functions that block suspicious incoming and outgoing activity.

<http://tinyurl.com/qbzqd>

Comodo Firewall Pro. ZoneAlarm is extremely popular, but that doesn't automatically make it the best free firewall you can find. One formidable contender is Comodo Firewall Pro, which independent testing site Matousec rated as the top firewall. Matousec found that Comodo offered the highest level of antileak protection, one measure of a firewall's effectiveness. Comodo offers true two-way firewall protection, is highly configurable, and (unlike most other firewalls) provides a great view of your system and your Internet connection.

<http://tinyurl.com/yvzza3>

Kerio Personal Firewall. In the first 30 days of using the Kerio Personal Firewall, you'll enjoy such features as pop-up blocking, cookie blocking, host based intrusion prevention, and others. After that, you can pay \$19.95 to keep those advanced features, or you can continue to use the firewall for free in a limited mode that's still effective. Although it isn't flashy, Kerio's interface is functional and easy to navigate, with comprehensive views of running programs, statistics, and other information. <http://tinyurl.com/aaspz>

You may use more than one registry cleaner. Here are three of the best FREE products.

RegScrubXP is a very popular utility designed to delete unnecessary information from the System Registry of Windows 2000 & XP (not Vista!) operating systems. This "junk" is often left behind when programs are uninstalled, and the information is not needed anymore. Programmers mistakenly load the Registry with junk as well. The result of cleaning out the junk is a smaller, faster Registry. Your operating system accesses the Registry a lot, so keeping it clean is a good idea! RegScrubXP also helps you tweak your Registry to provide a more pleasant computer experience.

<http://tinyurl.com/5p36qw>

Tweak Now Registry Cleaner: Deletes obsolete files from your registry.

<http://tinyurl.com/8e9xu>

EasyCleaner went through some growing pains a few years ago, but has matured nicely into a small suite of system-maintenance tools that works well.

<http://tinyurl.com/5vbeqa>

This registry cleaner is probably the best commercial product. Only \$12.95!

Guru Fred Langa recommends an outstanding full version registry cleaner program that offers a 30-day trial. During the thirty day window, you can put it through its paces before you decide whether or not you want to keep it. Program cost? Only \$12.95. Langa never recommends a product unless he has fully tested it. This may be the best \$12.95 you will ever spend! The program is listed below. It's called RegSupreme, a stand alone component of JV16 Power Tools. RegSupreme has two settings—regular and aggressive, to help prevent overcleaning—and also categorizes the problems it detects so you can help see and separate the serious problems from those that are less so. The "aggressive" setting will dig far deeper into your Registry. This Registry Cleaner, by default, not only shows you Registry items that should be safe to remove; it lets you examine each reported problem item one by one, if you wish, to help you be sure that any changes you make will be positive ones. However, the tool also requires you to make a backup of all items you remove so you can easily restore any Registry settings you delete in error.

<http://www.macecraft.com/downloads/>

(scroll down to middle-right of Webpage for \$12.95 product)

This application will not permit "uninvited" programs to run at startup.

StartupMonitor is a small utility that runs transparently (it doesn't even use a systray icon) and notifies you when any program registers itself to run at system startup. It prevents those utterly useless tray applications from

registering themselves behind your back, and it acts as a security tool against trojans.

<http://tinyurl.com/33jpz>

An alternative to Microsoft's Internet Explorer Browser

Mozilla Firefox

Mozilla Firefox is a fast, full-featured Web browser that makes browsing more efficient than ever before. Firefox includes pop-up blocking; a tab-browsing; integrated Google searching; simplified privacy controls that let you cover your tracks more effectively; a streamlined browser window that shows you more of the page than any other browser; and a number of additional features that work with you to help you get the most out of your time online.

<http://tinyurl.com/6h889w>