



SECURING YOUR COMPUTER AGAINST SPYWARE / ADWARE / MALWARE

“Spyware”, “adware” and “malware” are software programs which are causing increasing problems for users of Microsoft Windows systems. Users of other operating systems such as Mac OSX and Linux are largely unaffected. The most common symptoms of an infected machine are the presence of pop-up advertising when not actively browsing the internet, the appearance of new “helpful” search toolbars in the Internet Explorer browser, and/or a noticeable loss of system performance.

This info sheet provides a short introduction to these programs, and some links to software which can help you remove them. For additional information on securing your computer, see the ITS info sheet “*Securing your computer against Hackers and Viruses*” which is available from the ITS website.

What is spyware/adware/malware ?

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spyware>):

“Strictly defined, **spyware** consists of computer software that gathers information about a computer user without the user’s knowledge or informed consent, and then transmits this information to an external entity — usually one that expects to turn a profit from it in some way. Data-collecting programs installed with the user’s knowledge do not, properly speaking, constitute spyware, provided the user fully understands who collects what data.

More broadly, the term spyware applies to a wide range of related **malware** products. These products perform many different functions, including the delivery of unrequested advertising (pop-ups in particular) [a.k.a. **adware**], harvesting private information, re-routing page requests in order to illegally claim commercial site referral fees, and installing stealth phone dialers.

Unprotected Windows-based computers, particularly those used by children or credulous adults, can rapidly accumulate a great many spyware components — commonly several hundred individual instances. The consequences of a moderate to severe spyware infection (privacy issues aside) generally include a substantial loss of system performance (over 50% in extreme cases), and major stability issues (crashes and hangs). Difficulty connecting to the Internet also commonly occurs.

As of 2004, spyware infection causes more visits to professional computer repairers than any other single cause. In more than half of these cases, the user has no awareness of spyware and initially assumes that the system performance, stability, and/or connectivity issues relate to hardware, Windows installation problems, or a virus.”



Spyware removal tools

There are many applications available for removing spyware/malware from Microsoft Windows systems. The ones listed below have received favorable reviews in their effectiveness at removing spyware/malware programs and are free of charge. It is often recommended that more than one tool be used since there are literally thousands of versions of spyware and a single program can not reliably catch them all. Please read our disclaimer at the end of this document before installing any of these programs.

Note: When selecting a removal tool, choose one reviewed by a reputable site as some programs advertised as spyware removal tools actually contain spyware themselves !

- **Microsoft Windows Defender**
<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/products/winfamily/defender/default.mspx>
- **Lavasoft Ad-aware**
<http://www.lavasoftusa.com/software/adaware/>
- **Spybot Search & Destroy**
<http://www.safer-networking.org/>

Related Information

- Wikipedia spyware information:
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spyware>
- Microsoft information on protection from viruses, hackers and worms.
<http://www.microsoft.com/security/protect/>

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