

Spyware

- Spyware is a category of computer programs that attach themselves to your operating system in various ways.
- They are designed to track your Internet habits, nag you with unwanted sales offers, or generate traffic for their host site.
- According to recent estimates, more than two-thirds of all personal computers are infected with some sort of spyware.
- Spyware is not designed to damage your computer. It is created to send you targeted advertisements or make your browser display certain sites or search results.
- Most of the spyware targets Windows operating systems only.

Some of the largest spyware companies are:

Gator	Bonzi Buddy	180 Solutions	Euniverse
Cydoor	CoolWebSearch	Xupiter	DirectRevenue

Four ways spyware enters a user's computer:

1. **Software programs that install as part of another valid software program.** Sometimes these are called “free” add-ons or they come with free software programs downloaded from the Internet.
2. **Software programs that try to install automatically within a browser.** The only warning may be the browser's standard message stating the name of the software and asking if it's okay to install it.
3. **Pieces of software that add enhancement to a web browser, such as a toolbar, animated pal, or search box.** Some of these programs do what they are supposed to do (are valid) and some are nothing more than spyware.
4. **Software programs that are tricks.** A pop-up window will usually appear indicating that the computer is slowing down and might crash, and to click here to start the “cleaner”, which is actually the activator of the spyware product.

What does spyware do once it is downloaded on the computer?

- It runs as an application as soon as the computer starts up. This will take up RAM and processing power, and make the computer run slower.
- It generates endless pop-up ads which slow down the browser.
- It resets the browser's home page.
- It redirects web searches to other sites.
- It can modify the computer's DLL (dynamically linked libraries) files that are used to connect to the Internet; thereby causing connection failures.
- If connected through a modem, it can make the computer dial out to expensive long distance phone numbers.
- It can change the firewall settings to allow bad data in.
- Some spyware is smart enough that it will re-install itself each time you reboot the computer in case you try to remove it!

What are the laws to protect from spyware?

- **The “Computer Fraud and Abuse Act”** is a federal law that covers any unauthorized software installations.
- **The “Federal Trade Commission Act”** is a federal law that protects from deceptive trade practices.
- **The “Electronic Communications Privacy Act”** is a federal law that makes it unlawful for companies to violate the security of personal information.
- Many states are also creating their own laws to protect users from spyware.

How can users protect themselves?

- **Use a spyware scanner.** There are many free spyware scanners available on the Internet. Just make sure that the spyware definitions are frequently updated in order to maintain the most up-to-date protection.
- **Use a pop-up blocker.** Internet Explorer has a built in blocker, and there are several free versions available on the Internet. Pop-up blockers can be configured to allow certain sites to pop up windows. This is especially useful for sites where the email may pop up in another window.
- **Disable Active-X.** Change the security setting so the browser will have to ask for permission before installing any Active-X content.
- **Be suspicious of installing software.** If it is not a recognized plug-in, see if the browser will work without it. Users can always go back and install it later if it is valid!
- **Always use the “X” in the upper right corner to close a pop-up window.** Clicking anywhere inside the window will activate the software, or re-direct the browser.