CYBERLEX

Do you have a doctor on staff?

Viruses and junk email seem like an everyday event. Recent international plagues such as the Melissa Macro Virus and the Love Letter Virus have highlighted the damage computer viruses can cause. But let me ask this: Have you installed anti-virus software? If yes, do you keep the software current? If yes, do you scan every document and/or file you copy on to your system? If the answer is no to any of these questions, then you are at risk. If the answer is yes to all of these questions you are still at risk, however I think it fair to say that you have taken every reasonable step to detect and prevent damage to your system from a virus attack. The reality I think is that most users do not appreciate the damage that a virus can have and therefore to do not take the necessary steps to protect themselves.

You might notice if your system started to smoke or your monitor exploded, unfortunately a computer virus does not do any physical damage and therefore goes about its deadly business unseen. A computer virus is a program designed to spread itself from computer system to computer system. A virus can spread by email or simply by floppy disk. The computer user or "host" is usually unaware that they have been infected or that they are infecting others. The first sign of any trouble is usually noticed after the damage is done. The virus has contaminated your system and you have interacted with colleagues and/or friends

A virus must be executed or run for it to cause any harm or spread itself. Therefore, simply reading a text email message will not cause the virus to damage your system or spread itself. However, running an attachment or loading a document are actions that will give the virus an opportunity to infect your system. You might recall that in the first issue of *Balance* this year I suggested a number of new years resolutions. One of these resolutions is to never open an attachment to an email unless you know the sender very well, well enough to lend them money. With limited exceptions, and all of these with internal mail, I have kept this resolution. If you have not, I urge you to consider the risk you are putting on your system and the network you are operating on, not to mention the business you are working for.

So, how do you avoid virus infection? I think computer viruses are like the common cold, everyone will catch one at some point and its impact on your system will vary, some mild, some completely debilitating. However, the following are suggestions to help keep your system healthy:

1. Install anti-virus software from a well known, reputable software company that is regularly updating its product. If you are on a network, ask your system administrator if a package has already been installed and whether it checks automatically, how often it is updated and whether it checks email.

2. Use your anti-virus software.

3. Update your anti-virus software on a regular basis. Some of the packages provide updates via the internet and will install themselves in the background while you are logged on.

4. Scan new programs and files for viruses before running or opening them — regardless of where they came from.

5. Disable the auto-executing feature of any programs you use like email or Microsoft Word. You may need to contact your network administrator or use the on-line help to find out how to do this.

6. Be extremely careful about who you accept files and programs from.

7. Probably the most critical, make regular backups of critical data. If you restore a file from a backup due to virus damage make sure you scan the file as you may have been infected before the backup.

Some of the major anti-virus software vendors are:

* McAfee (www.mcafee.com)
* Symantec Corporation (www.symantec.com)
* Dr Solomon's Software Inc (www.drsolomon.com)
* Computer Associates International (www.cai.com)

and you have infected them. Next thing you know the virus has deleted all your files.

Jason Schoolmeester
jason.schoolmeester@nt.gov.au

ALERT!

Just after writing this article I received notification of a virus known as the Magistr virus/worm. It is particularly relevant for readers of *Balance* as it has a range of legal terms and phrases in the subject line. Examples include: verdict, guilty plea, affirmed, found guilty, circuit judge, judge, proceedings, habeas corpus. More information can be obtained from: http://www.europe.f-secure.com/v-descs/magistr.shtml.

DINNER TO WELCOME COMMONWEALTH HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONER AND DISABILITY COMMISSIONER, MR SEV OZDOWSKI O.A.M

INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF JURISTS NORTHERN TERRITORY BRANCH

The Northern Territory Branch of the International Commission of Jurists invites you to attend an informal dinner to welcome the new Commonwealth Human Rights Commissioner and Disability Commissioner, Mr Sev Ozdowski O.A.M.,

Thursday, 5 April 2001 at 7pm at the Asian Gateway Restaurant, Aralia Street, Nightcliff.

Please RSVP by 3 April 2001 by phoning:

Paul Walsh 8985 5878 or Mark Hunter 0419 001 945