

Internet Security
Popups/Spyware
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Many of us have heard of Spyware, but how many of us know just how destructive, much less, annoying, it can be. The Tribal Justice Information Sharing System(TJISS),part of the University of Arkansas Criminal Justice System, defines Spyware as:

Any software that covertly gathers user information through the user's Internet connection without his or her knowledge, usually for advertising purposes. Spyware applications are typically bundled as a hidden component of freeware or shareware programs that can be downloaded from the Internet. Once installed, the Spyware monitors user activity on the Internet and transmits that information in the background to someone else. Spyware can also gather information about e-mail addresses and even passwords and credit card numbers. Also called adware.

Now that we know what Spyware is, let's look at how we end up getting it.

Spyware is most commonly installed in the background while surfing the internet. Popup ads are one of the most common venues for Spyware programmers to use. Let's say you are toying around on the internet and all of a sudden A window pops up and says you are the one millionth user to enter that particular site and to click here to receive \$1000. The second someone clicks the ad, the Spyware installation starts in the background. Those that have even a little common sense, would know to close that window and keep surfing. But a lot of Popup/Spyware programmers know that by putting an X in the upper right hand corner will fool people into thinking that will close that popup. A good rule of thumb to go by is when popup ads are on the screen hover your mouse over the ad. DON'T CLICK IT, just hover over the ad. If your mouse pointer is a little hand with the forefinger pointing, and the mouse pointer never changes when you move the mouse around the ad, then don't use the X to close the popup. You can use the key combination ALT+F4 to close the ad.

If, by chance, you accidentally click on a popup ad and think you might have infected your PC, let's look at some ways to clean your PC up. In most cases, you can scan for Spyware with programs like Ad-Aware or Spybot Search and Destroy. These two programs can be downloaded for free from <http://www.download.com>. There are, however, times when these programs will not clean the infection. You may have to resort to manually removing registry entries and or removing files. This is better left to professionals, as the registry is what makes Windows tick. In some rare cases, your PC might have to be reloaded.

So what does this mean for me? Like it or not, there are consequences for not surfing smart. Some popups are just annoying, but some popups are the gateway to letting Spyware into your computer. Once your PC gets infected with Spyware, the possibilities are almost limitless. Someone could not only get *your*

information, but if you are using a PC here on campus, there is a great possibility of student information being stored on it. That opens up a whole new can of worms and also makes the college the responsible party for losing that information. If there is a possibility that student information gets stolen, laws state we must contact those students and let them know. The college could also face litigation from parties that had information stolen. I'm not meaning to scare you, as a state employee using college PCs, you must know the possibilities of negligent computer usage.

Spyware/Popups are a part of the internet today, like it or not, and there is nothing we can do about it. You have to surf smart and be aware of what you are clicking. A few extra seconds of awareness can mean the difference between winning your eBay auction, and losing your data.