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Spyware is becoming one of the biggest threats facing home and business computer users today. Simply put, spyware (also known as malware and adware, as well as many other descriptive names) is unwanted programs that install themselves either with software that you want or as you are browsing the internet. Some will ask for your permission to install themselves, others just install.

Some of these programs are designed to redirect your home page, redirect your search engine, monitor your browsing habits and report them back to the 'mother-server'. Others try to be helpful tools but end up slowing down your PC.

Here's what you can do to help protect yourself against these programs.

I'm not infected yet and want to protect my computer:
Antivirus. **Have it**. **Update it**. If your antivirus keeps prompting you that your subscription has run out and it hasn't updated it's definitions since March of 1999, then you aren't protected! A terrific free antivirus software is available from Grisoft as well as Avast.
Spyware blockers. The best things in life are sometimes free, and Microsoft's Anti-Spyware program is FREE! (You must be running Windows 2000 or Windows XP to use it, however). Download it, install it, let it run in the background and monitor your system and update itself. Some other alternatives are Spybot Search and Destroy (a free version is available) and Webroot Spy Sweeper (headquartered in Boulder Colorado!). AdAware is an excellent tool for keeping spyware off of your PC as well.
A good **Firewall** will also help in this arena, ZoneAlarm is free, Service Pack 2 for Windows XP ads a built in firewall, and free firewalls are also available from Kerio and Agnitum.
A **Pop-Up stopper**. You can get a free one from Panicware, Service Pack 2 for Windows XP also builds a pop-up stopper into Internet Explorer.
Many argue that an **Alternative Browser** such as Firefox, Netscape or Opera is also helpful in combating malware. But, as we recently saw, the vulnerabilities that have long been Internet Explorer's bane are now creeping into the other programs as they become more prevalent. I had been a diehard Netscape user, but as I found it crashing often, I switched to IE and have stayed there. Recently I've been using Firefox and find it a cool and useful browser. Because most web sites are designed for IE and Firefox is not quite 100% compatible, you may find that some things don't work. But that will change. For IE diehard fans, Microsoft has heard the call and coming sometime towards year end will be IE 7.
Beware of programs that we haven't mentioned, many so called Anti-Spyware programs are actually spyware themselves. Don't just download and install something because a windows pops-up while you are surfing the net telling you to do so because you have spyware.

Safe surfing. This is the part where I yell at the movie screen and tell the person that really, the basement isn't the safest place to go when the psycho killer is chasing you through the house with a knife. But…they always go there anyway. We all know what happens next. But, suppose the poor babysitter/college girl/slacker high school student had their very own body guard waiting for them in the basement. It might make all the difference in how the movie ends. Surfing the internet is the same. Sometimes we go places we know we shouldn't, and sometimes we end up at places where we have no idea we how we got there, and we know we shouldn't be there. If this happens, don't say yes, no, maybe, or anything to windows that pop-up. Close them by clicking on the red-x in the upper right hand corner. If they don't have a red-x, try closing them by right-clicking on their icon in the task bar and choosing close. If things keep happening, unplug the connection to the internet to stop them, then take the time you need to close things down. You can reconnect when you've gotten things sorted out.

I'm infected and need to clean infections from my computer:
First, don't panic. There are a lot of tools available to you to assist in cleaning spyware infections off of your computer. The first thing to do is to download, install and update Adaware from www.lavasoft.de. Once that's done, close down your internet connection and run Adaware. Follow the prompts and let it remove what it finds. If necessary, after installation, you can restart your computer in safe-mode (begin tapping the F8 key when you first turn on your computer to launch the Windows Start-up Menu). Next, update your antivirus definitions and run a complete scan of your system. As a last resort, if you have it enabled, you can try using a System Restore Point to return your computer to a state prior to the infection.
If you still have problems, pick-up the Batphone and call us at **303-637-9770**.
We recommend you let us pick up your PC, clean the infection, and return it to you, as some of the utilities to clean off infections can take 30 – 45 minutes to run, depending on the speed of your computer, the number of files you have, the state of infection of you computer, etc.
Once the infection has been cleaned off, then see 'I'm not infected yet and want to protect my computer' section above.
We've run into a few of these programs that are extremely difficult to root-out and remove.

If you are a small business owner with a network to protect, there are hardware and software devices available to help insulate and protect your network, from Firewalls that filter the web browsing of your employees, to centrally managed antivirus programs and spam filtering products that stop spam from getting into your network.

Call **JAG Computer Service** at **303-637-9770** and ask how we can help you with your computer and network needs today!

You can find links to the programs mentioned here today from our website, www.jagcs.com.

Computer Check List:

Item	Yes	No
Antivirus installed		
Antivirus definitions current		
Pop-up Blocker Installed		
Spyware Blocker Installed		
I want someone else to do this for me and make sure it's current from now on!	Call JAG Computer Service today at 303-637-9770	Don't wait to start protecting yourself! Do it today!