

Extra Feature Story

Cyber Crime and Spying Threaten National Security

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Criminals and foreign agents are using the Internet to infiltrate personal computers, spy on governments and perpetrate old-fashioned scams.

The FBI has now ranked cyber crime as the third-greatest threat to U.S. national security, after nuclear war and weapons of mass destruction.

The Department of Defense said it has spent \$100 million in the past six months responding to cyber attacks.

"We are finding ourselves in an ever-increasing, sophisticated environment where our networks at [the Department of Defense] are increasingly in a contested environment," Brig. Gen. John Davis of the U.S. Strategic Command told CNN.

National security

U.S. officials are concerned that other countries could use the Internet to infiltrate security networks or disrupt the power grid we rely on for electricity in homes and schools.

A recent report by the North American Electric Reliability Corp. revealed the electricity industry has not protected the nation's electricity infrastructure from a cyber attack, particularly from trained operatives in Russia or China.

"We know penetrations started more than 10 years ago. But we don't know all of them," James A. Lewis, a former federal computer security expert told the Washington Post.

Canadian researchers recently uncovered a vast Chinese online spying network that infiltrated offices of the Dalai Lama and various government agencies around the world.

There was no evidence the Chinese government was behind the spy network.

Evil viruses

Criminals from around the world also use the Internet to steal important information, trick people into scams and even take control of millions of computers at once.

Recently, a mysterious computer worm infected millions of computers around the world via Web sites and e-mail. The Conficker worm is capable of taking control of infected computers to be used commanded by whomever created it.

So far, the worm has forced some infected computers to download a fake anti-virus software, and experts are waiting to see what it does next. You can see if your computer is infected by clicking here: <http://www.confickerworkinggroup.org/wiki/>.

Other viruses can track what you type into your computer and see what you browse online, or they can be programmed to use your computer as a delivery service for spam messages -- sending massive amounts of spam can be a profitable business.

Melih Abduhlhayoglu, a computer security expert and CEO of Comodo Security, recently told Government Technology magazine that the world needs to come together to protect computer networks from criminals and viruses.

"It is much easier for someone to do an online crime from the comfort of their bedroom than trying to smuggle drugs," Abduhlhayoglu said.

"Many countries where these Internet crimes originate have no laws set up and they are not punishable."

Petty criminals

In fact, some communities are proud of their online criminals.

Don Jackson, whose job it is to hunt online criminals for SecureWorks, infiltrates hacker chat rooms that are often populated by young, male Russians who can make tens of thousands of dollars a month via online theft.

"There's an example recently where two boys were arrested actually and then let go the next day, but the article in the newspaper wasn't that they were arrested and that they committed a crime, but saying: 'Look at our two local boys made good. They've cheated some greedy Westerners out of so much money,'" Jackson told the CBS program "60 Minutes."

Fake sales, credit card and Internet auction fraud are up 33 percent from last year, at a cost of \$264.6 million, according to the Internet Crime Complaint Center, which is a partnership between the FBI and the National White Collar Crime Center.

American cyber security firm McAfee blamed the current economic slump for the spike in crime, as criminals take advantage of desperation and offer "get-rich-quick" scams.

-- Compiled by Corinne Schneider and Quinn Bowman for NewsHour Extra

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