

# PROTECT YOUR COMPUTER FROM THE NASTIES

(updated June 12, 2010)

Crackers (the bad guys) are constantly trying to find ways to violate the security barrier that you have established (or think you have established) to protect your system and data files from viruses, Trojan horses, worms, dialers, and various kinds of spyware. This list will show you where to find a number of free programs that will go a long way in protecting your privacy and security.

## **The Culprits Defined:**

*Virus: A program or piece of code that is loaded onto your computer without your knowledge and runs against your wishes. Viruses can also replicate themselves. All computer viruses are man-made. A simple virus that can make a copy of itself over and over again is relatively easy to produce. Even such a simple virus is dangerous because it will quickly use all available memory and bring your system to a halt. An even more dangerous type of virus is one capable of transmitting itself across networks and bypassing security systems.*

*Trojan: Trojan Horses or Backdoors open your PC from the inside to attackers. Once a Trojan is installed, someone can take full control of your computer. Most Trojans are delivered via email and just previewing the email can activate the Trojan.*

*Dialer: Dialers are small programs which reconfigure your dial-up number to dial a premium rate number without your knowledge, either at night or when your computer is idle. If you use a dial-up modem to connect to your Internet Service Provider you are at risk. Premium rate numbers can cost you hundreds in just a few days!*

*Worm: Worms are the most wide- spread hazard on the Internet. Worms arrive as emails with harmful attachments. If you open an attachment the worm will then copy and send itself to as many other computers as possible, damaging yours and your friend's systems.*

*Spyware: Your personal data and your habits are a goldmine for some advertising companies who seek to infiltrate your computer. Often you are not aware that a spyware program has been downloaded. This software can*

*collect personal information about you and your Internet habits, change your home page and even stop you from accessing some websites.*

**Check out your free options below. All have been highly recommended by nationally known experts.**

**Install this program first! It will block "uninvited" programs that want to run at startup.**

**StartupMonitor** is a small utility that runs transparently (it doesn't even use a systray icon) and notifies you when any program registers itself to run at system startup. It prevents those utterly useless tray applications from registering themselves behind your back, and it acts as a security tool against trojans. <http://tinyurl.com/33j pz>

**According to many experts, you should have a "cocktail" of anti-spyware programs installed on your computer, including several of these.**

**SpywareBlaster.** Although today's free antispysware apps are getting better at preventing spyware infections, their main focus remains on identifying and removing spyware after the threats infect your computer. However, SpywareBlaster works primarily on the prevention side, blocking spyware-related threats from installing and executing.

<http://tinyurl.com/3vcux>

**Spybot Search & Destroy.** If you need an effective, no-frills, spyware scanning application that can identify and remove most threats, Spybot Search & Destroy is a wise choice. In addition to basic scanning tools that target cookies, Internet dialers, browser hijackers, keyloggers, Trojans, and other malware, Spybot S&D features immunization tools for Internet Explorer that help block suspicious plug-ins and other downloads. Spybot S&D also provides a wealth of fine-tuning options that let you alter the way the program scans and removes spyware. <http://tinyurl.com/2b7s7>

**Ad-Aware Free Anti-Malware.** Long regarded as a trusted ally in the war against spyware, Lavasoft's Ad-Aware program remains an effective tool for identifying and removing threats. This free utility is now better than ever, featuring a scanning engine that scours extended memory (including modules loaded by processes) and can even identify new and unknown variants. <http://tinyurl.com/d35rh5>

**Microsoft Windows Defender.** Previously known as Microsoft AntiSpyware, Windows Defender is the antispyware tool that appears automatically in the Microsoft's Vista and Windows 7 operating systems; however, the program is freely available to any WinXP SP2 or SP3 user. This utility features a basic but slick interface that's easy to navigate and understand, in addition to a powerful scanner that catches a wide range of threats. As Windows Defender identifies such threats, the program alerts users with pop-up messages that indicate suspicious activity. If you use Microsoft Security Essentials as your anti-virus suite, this program will be turned off. **(listed as one of the best free programs by Consumer Reports, June 2009 edition)** <http://tinyurl.com/dyvaw>

**The Microsoft Windows Malicious Software Removal Tool** checks computers running Windows XP, Vista, or Windows 7 for infections by specific, prevalent malicious software and helps remove any infection found. When the detection and removal process is complete, the tool displays a report describing the outcome, including which, if any, malicious software was detected and removed. Microsoft releases an updated version of this tool on the second Tuesday of each month. New versions are available through the Microsoft Download Center at: <http://tinyurl.com/5lyxe>

**Malwarebytes' Anti-Malware.** Malwarebytes' Anti-Malware is extremely simple to use, and it will detect and remove malware from your computer. There is a FREE version. However, for \$24.95, you can add the Realtime Protection Module, which grants you real-time protection and scheduled updating and scanning. [www.malwarebytes.org](http://www.malwarebytes.org)

**SUPERAntiSpyware Free Edition** SUPERAntiSpyware can scan hard drives (internal and external), as well as the Registry and remove all manner of malware. You can also customize your scans, although you can't set up automatic scanning. [www.superantispyware.com](http://www.superantispyware.com)

**Advanced SystemCare.** This utility offers a one-stop-shop for cleaning and maintaining your computer for better overall system performance. The interface is very simple, featuring only a few buttons, which makes it easy to get down to cleaning immediately (in fact, it automatically runs on start-up) and doesn't confuse you with multiple steps.

The Maintain Windows section focuses on four areas of maintenance: spyware removal, Registry cleaning, a privacy sweep, and deletion of junk files. The Diagnose System button provides system optimization tools, detects spyware, defragments your disk, and scans for hijacked Windows settings. In tests run by C/Net the scan and clean for each of these areas took

less than 10 minutes to complete. In many of these scans, it is difficult to tell what exactly is being accomplished by some of the tools, but the editors at C/Net were able to test against other trusted apps, which confirmed Advanced SystemCare's efficacy in those areas.

Under the utilities section you are given several tools, which are similar to plug-ins, for other areas of optimization and diagnostic tests. Overall, Advanced SystemCare Free is a good way to maintain your system's speed and clear out junk files, but you'll need to remember to run it regularly because scheduling of scans is only available in the paid Pro version.

<http://tinyurl.com/ckmmrq>

### **Spyware Terminator**

Spyware Terminator's crisp, clean interface uses simple buttons and tabs to operate and set options. The latest spyware signatures are automatically downloaded, and the real-time protection keeps baby-sitting to a minimum. Real-time protection monitors key spyware types and Windows objects, though slight system slowdowns depend on your machine. Those features and the simple scheduler will make this app appealing to novices. Advanced users will appreciate Spyware Terminator's flexibility. Setting the sensitivity of various scans is as easy as moving a slider. Experienced users will want to enable the built-in antivirus tool, which extends the power of real-time analysis by comparing program code against a database of known viruses, Trojans, and worms.

From set-it-and-forget-it users to those delving into virus code, all will find Spyware Terminator flexible, simple, and effective, key measures of a good antispysware tool. <http://tinyurl.com/lmbec5>

**AVG LinkScanner Helps Avoid "Poison" Web Sites.** One of the greatest threats to your PC is so-called poisoned Web pages, which contain malicious downloads, or that may do damage to your PC all by themselves. Anti-spyware and anti-virus software may not protect you against these pages. If you're looking for an extra layer of protection against them, the free AVG LinkScanner is a good bet. Recommended by *PC World*.

<http://tinyurl.com/p3c682>

**CCleaner** is a freeware system optimization and privacy tool that removes unused and temporary files from your system—allowing Windows to run faster, more efficiently and releasing more hard disk space. It's fast and free!

Although it lacks a few features found in other PC-cleaning applications, this free program offers enough to make it a worthy download. The interface

is logically designed and makes it easy to wipe away your tracks from Internet Explorer and Mozilla, various Windows system areas, and a few third-party applications. Although CCleaner doesn't support a large number of extraneous programs as some competitors do, it can erase traces from such popular programs as Spybot - Search & Destroy and WinZip.

This application lacks a secure file shredder, but it makes up for the omission by supplying a Registry-cleaning utility, which quickly scans for invalid entries before removing them. CCleaner even can back up your Registry before removal, in case it accidentally removes a crucial component, and includes a feature for uninstalling any program on your machine.

The best place to find the CCleaner program for easy downloading is:

<http://tinyurl.com/mprrs>

**Most experts agree that you should never have more than one antivirus program running on your computer. Install only one of these. (If you are a Cox Internet client and have the McAfee Security Suite installed, you will not need another anti-virus program.)**

**Cox Security Suite by McAfee.** The McAfee Security Suite, available at **no extra cost** to Cox Internet clients, offers customers protection with these features: **Anti-Virus:** Blocks and removes viruses and even stops them before they ever get to your PC. **Anti-Spyware:** Blocks spyware and removes existing spyware before it installs on your computer. **Anti-Phishing via SiteAdvisor:** When browsing, a small button in browser toolbar changes color based on the SiteAdvisor safety results. When searching with popular search engines like Google, Yahoo!, or BING, SiteAdvisor safety ratings appear next to search results. **Firewall:** Intelligent firewall protection monitors your Internet traffic and alerts you of suspicious applications. **Parental (Grandparent) Controls:** Protects children online by filtering offensive content, pictures and websites. **Identity Protection:** Ability to monitor your outgoing Internet traffic and ask permission before personal information -- including PINs, bank accounts, SSNs and family names -- is sent from your PC. Complete instructions for downloading the program are available at: <http://scscc.com/bkk/CoxMcAfeeSecuritySuite.pdf> **(listed as the best commercial (\$70) program by Consumer Reports, June 2009 edition)**

**Microsoft Security Essentials.** Microsoft Security Essentials is new security software that helps protect against viruses, spyware, worms, and more. It provides comprehensive, high-quality protection from malicious software, and it works quietly in the background so it never interrupts your work. The best part is it's easy to download and completely free for customers running a genuine Windows operating system (XP with Service Pack 2 or greater, Vista, and Windows 7).

<http://www.microsoft.com/security/products/mse.aspx>

**AVG Anti-Virus Free Edition.** Although you'll get a fraction of the features found in AVG Professional, Grisoft's AVG Anti-Virus Free Edition still leaves you with a reliable utility that catches practically all viruses—with no hassle. Regular updates keep this program constantly on top of the latest threats, and automatic scanning makes sure your system is clean, even if you forget to use the scanner. A rudimentary interface provides quick access to scanning and resident shield options, including email scanning, as well as other tools. <http://tinyurl.com/czbxm>

**Avira AntiVir 9.** Avira's AntiVir continues to grow in popularity, and the latest major release--a Download.com exclusive--shows why this free security program is at the top of the charts. A brilliantly customizable one-click threat killer, baked-in anti-spyware and anti-adware to compliment the antivirus engine, the ability to scan "locked" files, a rebuilt heuristics engine, and infection protections for its own source files are what's new and notable in AntiVir 9.

The built-in spyware and adware detection have been available previously only to premium AntiVir users, so it's no small potatoes that they've been given to free edition users. The one-click threat removal has nifty quarantining feature that logs and sets aside all detected threats so you can deal with them individually or as a group at the end of the scan. It's simple, but means that you can run a scan at night and not worry about the scan pausing and waiting for user input before it continues.

Despite the nag window that pops up following the frequent threat definition file updates, the program is well worth trying to see how far free security has come. **(listed as the best free Anti-virus program by Consumer Reports, June 2009 edition)** <http://tinyurl.com/ckfq6>

**avast! 4 Home Edition.** This free, feature-packed utility integrates elements typically found in premium products, including Web Shield, which monitors and filters HTTP (Hypertext Transfer Protocol) traffic for malware, and Network Shield, which works on systems using Windows XP to protect

against Internet-based attacks such as worms. The avast! 4 home program's resident protection offers multiple settings to fine-tune your antivirus environment exactly as you see fit, including email options for scanning various protocols and a separate plug-in for Microsoft Outlook.

<http://tinyurl.com/h4akm>

**Web-Based Anti-Virus Program.** To double-check the effectiveness of your one onboard antivirus program, use a free Web-based antivirus program such as HouseCall. Since this program is Web-based, it can be used as a complement to your installed anti-virus program.

<http://housecall.trendmicro.com/>

These programs also offer free online scans:

**Kaspersky Lab.** [www.kaspersky.com/virusscanner](http://www.kaspersky.com/virusscanner)

**BitDefender Online Scanner.**

[www.bitdefender.com/scanner/online/free.html](http://www.bitdefender.com/scanner/online/free.html).

**Panda ActiveScan.**

[www.pandasecurity.com/homeusers/solutions/activescan/](http://www.pandasecurity.com/homeusers/solutions/activescan/)?

**ESET Online Antivirus Scanner.** [www.eset.com/onlinescan/](http://www.eset.com/onlinescan/)

**Jotti's malware scan.** [www.virusscan.jotti.org/](http://www.virusscan.jotti.org/)

**VirusTotal.** [www.virustotal.com/](http://www.virustotal.com/)

**Have only one software firewall running on your system. (If you are a Cox Internet client with McAfee Security Suite installed, you will not need a firewall.)**

**ZoneAlarm.** This well-known, trusted firewall from Zone Labs continues to be a popular choice among home users, thanks to its wealth of options, ease of use, and free price tag. In addition to basic firewall functions that block suspicious incoming and outgoing activity. <http://tinyurl.com/qbzqd>

**Comodo Firewall Pro.** ZoneAlarm is extremely popular, but that doesn't automatically make it the best free firewall you can find. One formidable contender is Comodo Firewall Pro, which independent testing site Matousec rated as the top firewall. Matousec found that Comodo offered the highest level of antileak protection, one measure of a firewall's effectiveness. Comodo offers true two-way firewall protection, is highly configurable, and (unlike most other firewalls) provides a great view of your system and your Internet connection. <http://tinyurl.com/dcdget>

**Sunbelt Kerio Personal Firewall.** In the first 30 days of using the Kerio Personal Firewall, you'll enjoy such features as pop-up blocking, cookie blocking, host based intrusion prevention, and others. After that, you can pay \$19.95 to keep those advanced features, or you can continue to use the firewall for free in a limited mode that's still effective. Although it isn't flashy, Kerio's interface is functional and easy to navigate, with comprehensive views of running programs, statistics, and other information. <http://tinyurl.com/cutgog>

**PC Tools Firewall Plus** Firewall Plus works transparently on your system, so you can let it run while you work or play. Rather than eliminating malware, it's designed to keep malware from infecting your system in the first place. <http://www.pctools.com/firewall/>

**You may use more than one registry cleaner. Here is the best FREE product.**

**Tweak Now RegCleaner.** Its newest version was released on October 17, 2009 and is compatible with Windows XP, Windows Vista, and Windows 7! It's FREE. <http://tinyurl.com/yec9cv3>

## **Other Browsers as Alternatives to Microsoft's Internet Explorer Browser**

**Mozilla Firefox** Mozilla Firefox is a fast, full-featured Web browser that makes browsing more efficient than ever before. Firefox includes pop-up blocking; a tab-browsing; integrated Google searching; simplified privacy controls that let you cover your tracks more effectively; a streamlined browser window that shows you more of the page than any other browser; and a number of additional features that work with you to help you get the most out of your time online. <http://tinyurl.com/6h889w>

### **Other Recommended Browsers:**

**Opera** at <http://www.opera.com/download/>

**Maxthon** at <http://www.maxthon.com/>

**Google Chrome** at <http://tinyurl.com/5knrs>

**Safari\*** at <http://www.apple.com/safari/download/> \*this is an Apple browser that works well with Microsoft