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# Senate bill seeks to limit, eradicate invasive spyware

Software that collects information and advertises on personal computers can slow a system to a crawl

BY EVA SYLWESTER  
NEWS REPORTER

Many University students puzzle over why their computers operate slowly for no apparent reason. They could be experiencing the effects of spyware, a target marketing tool that some members of the U.S. Senate are now targeting for prohibition.

According to the Microsoft Web site, spyware is computer software that performs operations such as advertising, collecting personal information or changing the configuration of the host computer, generally without obtaining the computer owner's consent.

"It's strictly target marketing," University Housing computer coordinator Norm Myers said, adding that spyware is not involved in identity theft. Spyware mainly causes problems with computer operations.

"As it looks at what you do, it uses up your computer's resources," Myers said.

Myers said at UO ResNet, which provides computer services to University Housing residents, he frequently deals with spyware complaints.

"This spyware is more prevalent than the viruses right now," Myers said. "We get some computers slowed down to a crawl."

Signs of a spyware infection, according to the Microsoft Web site, include frequent pop-up advertisements unrelated to the content of the Web site, mysteriously changed Internet settings and slowing or frequent crashing of the computer.

Myers said spyware causes especially dramatic problems when a computer is infected with multiple pieces of spyware. He compared the interaction between the different spyware programs to being in a car with two drivers, one trying to drive to Idaho and the other to California.

"I've seen up to 120 different pieces of spyware on a computer," Myers said.

Myers said spyware is often contracted through Web sites.

"The ones I can guarantee are the music-sharing ones," Myers said, adding that Web sites providing free screen savers and network games also can cause problems. He advised students to pay close attention to the process when they download software from the Internet.

"If you just go next-next-next-next,

most of the time you add extra stuff you don't want," Myers said.

Myers said college students are at increased risk for spyware problems because they are more likely to use file-sharing programs and ethernet connections rather than modems.

"You compare your average college student to a 34-year-old housewife ... the college student's more likely to get it," Myers said.

Most spyware currently targets Windows XP operating systems and the Microsoft Internet Explorer web browser, Myers said. Spyware has also been made for Windows 98 and Windows Millennium operating systems, and Myers said spyware can cause more problems on these older operating systems.

Macintosh computers are currently less vulnerable to spyware problems than computers with Windows operating systems, Myers said.

"It's way behind," he said, describing the state of spyware development for Macintosh computers. "It's going to get worse, but right now it's not a problem."

Myers said most spyware programs are not difficult to remove given the proper tools. He recommended Spybot - Search & Destroy ([www.safer-networking.org/en/index.html](http://www.safer-networking.org/en/index.html)) and Ad-Aware ([www.lavasoftusa.com/software/adaware/](http://www.lavasoftusa.com/software/adaware/)), both of which can be downloaded from the Internet for free.

Pending legislation headed by U.S. Senators Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) and Conrad Burns (R-Mont.) targets spyware. The Software Principles Yielding Better Levels of Consumer Knowledge (SPY BLOCK) Act, was introduced in the U.S. Senate on March 20.

According to a press release, the bill would prohibit surreptitious installation of software. This includes tricking users into installing software by misrepresenting its source, software that cannot be disabled and software that collects a computer's user information without the user's knowledge for purposes other than maintaining intended operations of existing online service or software. It also prohibits installing software that causes ads to appear, unless the software identifies itself as the source of the ads, and various other deceptive practices that thwart a user's control over his or her computer.

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## Education: Program would decrease financial burden

Continued from page 1

to prioritize all programs based on outcomes, and since one of our top priorities is reducing the dropout rate, we believe this program meets that standard," Gordly said.

Starr said he hopes to encourage people who receive assistance from the state to support themselves and make a real contribution to society.

"We do have a heart, and we're truly concerned that these people are disadvantaged because of the circumstances under which they were born, not because of who they are," Starr said.

According to the press release, state grants to school districts would subsidize costs for the courses rather

than charging students the standard course fees. Students attending public schools in grades 11 or 12 who are at least 16 years old would be eligible for the program.

University spokeswoman Pauline Austin said the University would continue its Ducklink program regardless of the legislation's outcome. According to the Office of Admissions, the existing program allows eligible Lane County high school students who have exhausted the course options in their public school to take University courses. The University waives instruction fees for those students.

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