Help! My Computer Has Been Invaded
Information on the Problem of Spyware and What You Can Do

Spyware and Adware (referred to as spyware throughout most of this document) are the newest plagues of the Internet. Spyware is now as big of a problem – if not bigger – than viruses. Spyware gets on your computer while browsing the Internet slowing down your Internet often causing a lot of popup ads and sometimes logging your keystrokes. As for computer performance in severe cases they can make your computer or Internet service almost unusable due to all the popup ads and background behavior. At worst, they can result in the need to reload your system software. As for security, if the spyware is doing key logging at worst your credit card, bank account and other personal data can be stolen. You need to know what spyware is, how you get spyware, and how to prevent and get rid of spyware. The Internet can still be safe to use for doing business—but you have to exercise caution to protect yourself.

What Is Spyware?

The following definitions are from http://www.webopedia.com/

Spyware -- Any software that covertly gathers user information through the user's Internet connection without his or her knowledge, usually for advertising purposes.

Adware -- A form of spyware that collects information about the user in order to display advertisements in the Web browser based on the information it collects from the user's browsing patterns.

How Do You Get Spyware?

First, even though you probably do not recall doing it, you agreed to allow the spyware to be installed on your computer. Trickery is often used to get you to agree to this. Most spyware is not considered to be a virus because you agreed to allow it to be installed.

There are many methods that load spyware programs on your computer. Probably the most common method is by attaching spyware to another program. This is usually in a shareware or freeware program. A common example is a file sharing program – those free programs that allow you to download music or other files and allows others to upload music and other files from your computer. The use of these programs are becoming more and more common. The creators of these "free" programs make their money through spyware! They monitor your web and computer habits, then they use adware to send you advertisements that you are most likely to respond to. The advertisers pay the creators of these programs every time you click on the advertisement. Be cautious when using free software that you download from the Internet.

Another common way that spyware programs get installed is by advertising as a program that will help prevent spyware. You download the program and think you are protected, but instead you are being spied on. If the program asks you to pay to prevent spyware it is probably not a program to trust. There are many free anti-spyware programs (info about a few below). These free programs are developed by people trying to combat the spyware problem. Many of these companies ask for a donation for their efforts. It would be kind to financially compensate these people for their work, but not required.

Spyware may also be installed by asking you to download a needed program to view a web page. Gator is famous for this method. You visit a web page and an ad pops up telling you to download a program to correctly view the page. The ad looks exactly like a Microsoft Windows installation screen. Many click yes thinking that it is needed to view the web page, not reading the documentation and just clicking the next button. There you have it, more spyware.

Here's another method used to install spyware: You view a webpage and you get a message that your computer is broadcasting an IP address and warning you of the security issues involved. The ad suggests that you download a program to secure your computer. The IP address is the Internet Protocol address. It is a unique address of every device on the Internet. When you go to a webpage you send a request to an IP address asking that device to send the webpage to your IP Address. If you didn't share your IP address you could not do anything on the Internet. In other words, this address *must* be broadcast and is not a security risk.

How Do You Prevent and Get Rid of Spyware?

The only way to prevent spyware is to exercise cautions against the items listed above. **Do not install programs you do not trust**. **Read agreements if you are not absolutely sure about the program**. If you are unsure about the program, look up the program in a search engine and find a link to user comments. Don't get opinions from the software creator's site though. Look around. Unfortunately most computers on the Internet have some level of spyware. It is difficult to completely prevent spyware.

There are several good programs available to remove spyware. Keep in mind that Connecting Point does not guarantee these programs will solve all of your spyware related problems. One of the natures of spyware is that it often changes system files. To repair the file you need to go through the spyware's uninstall utility (not all spywares have one). You can find this by going to your control panel and Add/Remove Programs, but you must know which programs are spyware. (If you do not go through the programs uninstall utility then other system files may not be corrected leading to problems in the operation of the computer after the spyware is removed.) Spyware removal programs will help you determine which programs are spyware. They scan your system and lists spyware programs found. They usually list the filename and not the program name, although the filename may include the program name.   Look through your Add/Remove programs list for things that look like the files that the spyware removal program found. Then look the program up on an Internet search engine for user comments to find out if it is actually spyware. If it is spyware, uninstall it and then run your spyware removal program again removing the files that are left over. If you are not sure if a program is spyware **DO NOT REMOVE THE PROGRAM**. (Connecting Point is not responsible

for repairs you perform yourself.) If you are not comfortable doing this maintenance yourself, call us (402-371-4530) and setup an appointment to bring your computer in for service. We cannot walk you through this over the phone as it is a time consuming task. Remember that **CONNECTING POINT IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR PROBLEMS THAT RESULT FROM YOUR HOME REPAIRS OF SPYWARE**. This document is given as a courtesy to assist you. We have a full service department and can work on your computer in the store if you are not comfortable doing it yourself.

Where to get spyware removal programs from:

(Windows 98 or above)
Ad-Aware http://lavasoft.de

Spybot Search and Destroy http://www.safer-networking.org/en/index.html

(Windows XP)
Microsoft Windows AntiSpyware (Beta)
http://www.microsoft.com/downloads/details.aspx?FamilyID=321cd7a2-6a57-4c57-a8bd-dbf62eda9671&displaylang=en

You should read the documentation on the website of the program you choose and the documentation that comes with the program after you install it. Make sure you know how to use the program. As a precaution each of these programs have a quarantine option—USE IT. What this does is move the original file to a protected location on your computer so that if needed it can be recovered. I recommend leaving all changes in quarantine for at least 1 week to ensure that everything is running correctly.

Again, please remember that this information has been provided as a courtesy to our customers. **CONNECTING POINT IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR PROBLEMS THAT RESULT FROM YOUR HOME REPAIRS OF SPYWARE.** For assistance, please contact the Service Department at Connecting Point for an appointment (402-371-4530).