

Spyware is a type of malware (malicious software) installed on your computer without your consent to monitor or control your computer use. Clues that spyware is on a computer may include a barrage of pop-ups, a browser that takes you to sites you don't want, unexpected toolbars or icons on your computer screen, keys that don't work, random error messages, and sluggish performance when opening programs or saving files. In some cases, there may be no symptoms at all.

While the term spyware suggests that software that secretly monitors the user's computing, the functions of spyware extend well beyond simple monitoring. Spyware programs can:

- Collect information stored on the computer or attached network drives,
- Collect various types of personal information, such as Internet surfing habits, sites that have been visited
- Collect user names and passwords stored on your computer as well as those entered from the keyboard.
- Interfere with user control of the computer
- Install additional software on the computer
- Redirect Web browser activity.
- Change computer settings, resulting in slow connection speeds, different home pages, and/or loss of Internet or functionality of other programs.

The best defense against spyware and other unwanted software is not to download it in the first place. Here are a few helpful tips that can protect you from downloading software you don't want:

- Update your operating system and Web browser software, and set your browser security high enough to detect unauthorized downloads.
- Use anti-virus and anti-spyware, as well as a firewall software, and update them all regularly.
- Do not download applications from the Internet. If you need to install applications from the Internet, download applications only from sites you know and trust. Enticing free software downloads frequently bundle other software, including spyware.
- Don't click on links inside pop-ups.
- Don't click on links in spam or pop-ups that claim to offer anti-spyware software; you may unintentionally be installing spyware.
- Read all security warnings, license agreements, and privacy statements associated with any software you download.
- **Never** click "Agree" or "OK" to close a window. Instead, click the red "x" in the corner of the window or press **Alt + F4** on your keyboard to close a window.
- Be wary of popular "free" music and movie file-sharing programs, and be sure you understand all of the software packaged with those programs.
- Use a standard user account instead of an administrator account.

- Do not install any software programs on to your computers without supervisor approval. These include but are not limited to toolbars, screensavers, background images, registry cleaners, chat software, social networking software, etc.