

Protecting Your Personal Computer

Your personal computer, just like your work computer, is under constant attack. However, your personal computer may not have all the security measures we use in our organization. This newsletter covers some simple steps you can take to protect yourself at home.

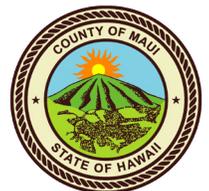


This newsletter is published by County of Maui, HI.

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www.mauiCounty.gov/cybersecurity



Protecting Your Personal Computer

Just as your computer is a target at work, so too is your personal computer at home. Your personal information, personal accounts, personal emails and even the computer itself are tremendously valuable to cyber criminals. In addition, you may not have all the security resources at home that we have deployed within our organization. As such, your personal computers are at risk. However, there are some simple, effective steps you can take to protect your personal computers.

Solution

The first step is to always be sure your computer's operating system has the latest patches installed and runs the latest versions of your programs, such as your browser. Old or outdated operating systems and programs have known vulnerabilities that attackers can exploit. The simplest way to protect yourself is to ensure automatic updating is enabled for both your computer and your programs. This helps ensure new patches are always installed in a timely manner. If you are no longer using a program, remove or uninstall it.

In addition to programs, you should ensure your browser plugins or add-ons are current. Every plugin you add to your browser becomes another potential avenue for cyber criminals to attack. Just like programs, if you are no longer using a browser plugin, remove or uninstall it. The fewer plugins you have, the fewer vulnerabilities your browser will have. We recommend you check your browser plugins at least once a month.

To protect your online privacy, consider using your browser in private mode. Most browsers support this common feature. When enabled, your browser will not record online activity (such as the websites you visit), will not cache website content and will usually wipe any cookies stored on your system. Many browsers also support the 'reset' option, which deletes any existing information currently stored about your browsing habits, such as stored cookies.

It is also important to have a firewall installed and enabled on your computer. Firewalls help protect against port scans, worms and other malicious connections. In addition, make sure you are using updated anti-virus to help protect your system against Trojans, viruses and other forms of malware. Ensure that your anti-virus is set to automatically update, as new signatures are constantly being released. While anti-virus cannot detect nor stop all types of malware, it can help protect against the most commonly known versions.

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If your personal computer is a laptop, you may need to take some additional steps to protect it, especially if you travel with it. The first step is to always secure it with a login and password. You most likely also want some type of encryption, often called Full Disk Encryption. This combination of a screen password and encryption helps protect your computer and its information in case it is lost or stolen. In addition, you may want to install tracking software on your laptop. That way, if you do lose it (or if it is stolen), you can track its location or remotely wipe all of your information.

Finally, be sure you are doing regular backups of your information, such as family pictures or valuable documents. If your computer does get hacked, often the only way you can recover it is by reinstalling your operating system and recovering your personal files from a backup. Ultimately, you are your own best defense for your computer and mobile devices. Always use common sense. If something seems odd or too good to be true, it may be an attack.



Which Anti-Virus Is Best?

A couple of common questions people ask are which anti-virus software is the best and which firewall program they should buy. It really does not matter, as long as the solution comes from a well-known and trusted security company. Most home-use security products are very similar in functionality. The one that is best for you is most likely whichever product you find the easiest to use. In addition, most security products now come packaged as a suite. This means all the different security programs, such as firewalls, anti-virus and web filters, are included as a single solution. The advantage of a combined package is that all the different tools you need to secure your computer are integrated into a single program and interface. If you do purchase such a solution, make sure it is enabled and always running the latest version.

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