



# ***TECH TIPS***

June 2008

## **System Maintenance Tips**

### Stopping Spyware

Spyware is basically a type of program that gathers information about you without your knowledge. This information may be distributed to many sources or just a single source.

Note that if a program alerts you that your personal information may be shared it is not "technically" spyware, but it can be considered "Adware".

Spyware programs can be extremely annoying and can wreak havoc on your system. They can cause slow downs, lockups, and all sorts of other problems.

The bad news is there are hundreds of these types of programs out there. Some common spyware programs include: Hotbar, Comet Cursor, Xupiter, Gator, Offer Companion and BonziBuddy.

Before downloading any "free" program from the internet, be sure to read the licensing agreement. did you know that Increadimail is technically adware? How about RealOne Player—it puts "data mining" software on your system to "track preferences" and report back to the mothership. Even free CD games from a cereal box or fast food kid's meal can put "adware" (often called "foist ware") on your system.

Now, what to do about it. There are two great programs out there: Spybot Search & Destroy and Ad-Aware. Spybot is very thorough, but it often lists files that aren't spyware making it more likely that you accidentally delete something you need. Ad-Aware is the easiest to use and my personal favorite.

Download and install Ad-Aware from this location:

<http://www.lavasoftusa.com/software/adaware/>

To download and install Spybot S & D go to this location:

<http://download.com.com/3000-2144-10122137.html>

The first time you run a scan with either program; don't be surprised if you find a few hundred spyware/adware varminths hiding in your system. If so, once deleted your computer should start running a lot faster. Run a scan along with your usual monthly maintenance routine.

Did you know that you can also prevent Spyware from getting on your system to begin with?

I'm talking about a free way to do it, at least with Internet Explorer. I tried to find Netscape and Opera methods, but didn't find any.

Just head over to Tools / Internet Options then click the "Security" tab and the "Custom Level" button.

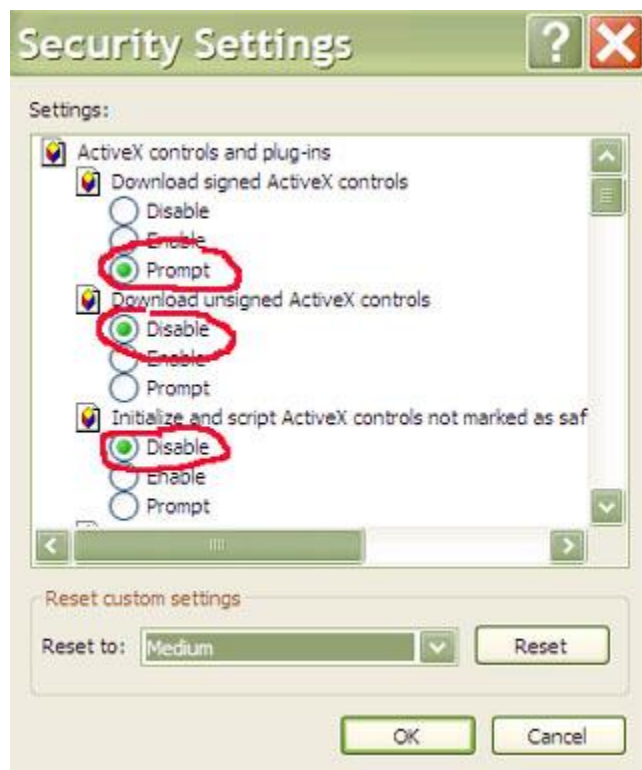
You'll see a list of settings, the first of which is "ActiveX Controls and plug-ins". Here you can specify what .dll files you will allow on your system.

Here's a good setup:

"Download signed ActiveX controls" — Prompt. You will be asked before a website tries to put Gator, Comet Cursor, or other adware on your system.

"Download unsigned ActiveX controls" — Disable. This kind of .dll files don't tell you who they're from and are usually always spyware trying to sneak its way in.

"Initialize and script ActiveX controls not marked as safe" — DEFINATELY Disable. Duh! This category includes spyware, worms, and other online nastiness. Keep 'em out!



Once done, click OK.

With just a few changes, your web browsing is a whole lot safer.

## Computer Tips

### Control Panel Views

What am I talking about? Well, you may or may not know that the Control Panel on your computer has two different views. That's right; it has a **Classic View** and a **Category View**. They're both very different and either one of them can be used for all sorts of things. It's also very easy to switch back and forth between them. Read on!

Let's start with the Classic View. If you choose this particular option, you will see a box that's filled with different icons. They include everything from Accessibility Options to Date and Time to Printers and Faxes to User Accounts and so on. It contains quite a bit more than the Category View does, but it's also an older version of the Control Panel. On the other hand, the Category View is a more condensed version, but it still has everything you could possibly need from the Control Panel.

Now, certain computer techniques require you to be in a particular view and if you're not in the right one, you may run into some trouble. But, like I said earlier, it's very easy to switch between them, so you're never too far from where you need to be. To see how you can do that, go to **Start, Control Panel** and look in the top left hand corner. There you will see a link that either says "**Switch to Category View**" or "**Switch to Classic View**." Once you click on that, you will be taken to the Control Panel you need and you can get your work done. It's as easy as pie!

## Just a few "What is?" answers for you!

### What is spyware?

Spyware is software that will usually download components onto your machine that will send marketing information whenever you are online. The software can track what sites you visit, items your purchase, etc. Software spyware can also capture your keystrokes, read emails and log contents of chat conversations. (eBlaster is an example of such spyware.)

### What is adware?

Adware is very similar to spyware. It's software that is installed on your computer, usually from free software, that contains banner ads. The difference is that this type of software usually notifies you that the information is going to be shared with third parties. Read the privacy agreement and/or license agreement carefully.

### Defrag – what is it? And how often do I need to do it?

When you save a file to your hard drive, the computer just saves it to the most convenient spot at the moment. This may not be the "best" location when we go to retrieve that file the next day. It may be behind a bunch of other non-related stuff that I haven't looked at in weeks. The hard disk reader sorts thru all that junk to finally pull out my file from yesterday. As you delete files, a new space is allocated that may or may not get used in any particular order either. Kind of like a parking lot. Cars pull in and out at random. At any given time, there may be space close that's not being used and cars parked randomly on out. What a defrag does is stops all new cars from entering. It takes all

the cars from the back and moves them into available slots at the front of the lot. At the end, all the front lots are filled and the open slots are all together at the end of the filled rows.

You should do a defrag if you've been moving a lot of cars around – installing software and deleting software and files. It's a good idea to perform a defrag monthly even if you haven't been moving around the parking lot much.

### **ScanDisk**

For Windows 98. Run monthly to clean and organize your hard drive.

### **Chkdsk**

For Windows 2000 and XP. Run monthly to clean and organize your hard drive

To start just click Start, Run and type cmd. If you do not see just C:\> at the prompt, type “cd..” (that's two dots after cd).

Then type “chkdsk” (or ScanDisk - depending on your Operating System) at the C:\> prompt. and follow the onscreen instructions.

If your chkdsk returns errors, type “chkdsk /f” when running chkdsk a second time. This will attempt to fix the errors which are usually just a case of a registry mishap. And again, follow the onscreen instructions.

Source: associatedcontent.com