Monthly Security Tips

NEWSLETTER

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Securing Your Laptop

From the Desk of Darrell Davis

Laptops are increasing in popularity for both business and personal use. The portability of laptops makes them extremely convenient. However, we must also be aware of the security risks from the loss or theft of laptops, and take proper precautions. The potential loss is twofold; the loss of the laptop itself and any personal, private or sensitive information that it may contain.

While you can take steps to secure the data on your laptop by installing a firewall, updating your antivirus software, using strong passwords and encrypting your information, it is also very important to physically protect your laptop. Laptops can easily be stolen from the locked trunk of a car, at an airport security checkpoint, at an Internet café or even from a hotel room. Keep these tips in mind when you travel with your laptop:

- **Secure your laptop when unattended.** Attach the laptop with a security cable to something immovable or to a heavy piece of furniture when it is unattended. There are devices that sound an alarm when there is unexpected motion or when the computer is moved outside a specified range around you.
- **Don't store your password with your laptop.** You should secure your laptop with a strong password, but don't keep the password in the laptop case or on a piece of paper stuck to the laptop.
- **Don't leave your laptop in your car.** Don't leave your laptop on the seat or even locked in the trunk. Locked cars are often the target of thieves.
- **Don't store your laptop in checked luggage.** Never store your laptop in checked luggage. Always carry it with you.
- **Keep track of your laptop when you go through airport screening.** Hold onto your laptop until the person in front of you has gone through the metal detector. Watch for your laptop to

emerge from the screening equipment.

- **Record identifying information and mark your equipment.** Record the make, model and serial number of the equipment and keep it in a separate location. Consider having the outside of the laptop case labeled with your organization's contact information and logo.
- **Use tracking software.** Consider use of commercial software that reports the location of a stolen laptop once it's connected to the Internet.
- **Backup your files.** Make a backup of your files before every trip. In the event that your laptop is lost or stolen, you will still have a copy of your data.

If your laptop is stolen, there are a number of steps you can take:

- Report it immediately to the local authorities.
- If it is your business laptop, immediately notify your employer.
- If your laptop contained personal or private information that might be used by an identity thief, visit ftc.gov/idtheft for more information on what steps you should take.
- Contact the laptop manufacturer so if the thief sends it in for repair, you may be notified.

For more information on securing your laptop:

http://onguardonline.gov/laptop.html
www.us-cert.gov/cas/tips/ST04-017.html
www.scambusters.org/laptop.html

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