

How well is your personal information protected?

Superintendents and the Internet

If you like most superintendents today you have had to warm to the idea of having a personal computer play a role in the operations of your department. You've probably even become used to using the Internet to troll for information about turf management or get your daily weather and news.

Most of us have several critical files that we keep regarding the operations of our department. These are probably spread sheets, documents and maybe database info from our favorite turf management software and irrigation programs. Some of this data pertains to this year and some of it dating back years as an archive of sorts. We have all had to go through the pain of losing files too, either through a hardware failure or mistakes like overwriting a file, or dare I say it "viruses". As we learn from having to redo our hard work and hours that went into our project proposal or budget that seems to have disappeared from our computer, we learn to 'backup'.

Ok, now our valuable files are safely backed up and we have a current anti-virus program installed and are fully protected, or are we?

When we are on line we open ourselves up to a type of snooping that could expose the information on our computer to prying eyes. Yes it is possible for someone to 'peek inside' and take a look around while you are on line. This becomes even more of a problem when you are connected around the clock as with a DSL or a cable connection to the Internet. Add to this the fact that the as the Internet reaches further and further out the amount of unlawful users will expand. Policing this type of activity will be next to impossible. This leaves only one option - protect yourself.

Enter the firewall. The concept of a firewall has existed for years in the corporate environment where espionage is a constant problem. The last three or four years has seen these products migrate to the PC. Each networking service that your computer uses (such as email, our browsing the web) has a dedicated port. A port is basically a door through which your computer communicates with the outside world. The default windows installation leaves some 65,000 ports open on your PC and vulnerable to attack. Essentially what a firewall does is monitor your computer's ports and permit only those accesses which you allow and attempts to close ones not needed.

Examples of firewall programs for the PC are Norton Internet Security, which includes personal firewall as well as Norton's anti-virus program and McAfee's personal firewall both of which sell for below \$100 CDN and are available locally. There are probably more than 60 other programs worthy of note out there.

It must be noted that these programs are not a 100% guarantee of security (nothing ever is when dealing with the Internet) but they should offer a level comfort that helps one sleep a little better knowing they are doing the best they can to protect themselves.

Surf Safe!

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