

# Has my computer been infected with spyware?

The following symptoms can indicate the presence of spyware:

- Annoying **pop-ups** appear on your screen when you switch on your computer or when you are surfing the internet. Those pop-ups were not there before.
- When you start your browser, you get a **different homepage** from the one you had set. It also turns out to be difficult to change it back. Or, your search page has been changed without you having done anything.
- Your desktop contains **icons** you did not put there.
- Suddenly you find one or more **toolbars** located under the address bar in your browser you did not ask for.
- When you type in a **wrong internet address**, you are always sent to the same, often commercial website.
- Your computer has noticeably **slowed down**.

# What can you do?

- Spyware can automatically be installed on computers that are insufficiently protected. Go to <http://windowsupdate.microsoft.com> and regularly download the latest **repair software and system updates**.
- Install a good **virus scanner and firewall** and keep them up to date. You can obtain good programmes at a computer store or from your internet service provider.
- Install **anti-spyware programmes** such as Lavasoft Ad-Aware, Spybot – Search & Destroy or Microsoft Anti-Spyware. Have these programmes regularly scan your computer. When they find spyware, they will ask you whether it should be removed or not. Be careful of what programmes you use, though. You can buy fake anti-spyware software that actually contains spyware!
- In order to make sure you have closed a pop-up, **click on the red X** in the upper right corner of the pop-up window or simultaneously hold the Alt and F4 keys.
- Be aware that you can never fully protect yourself. **Think clearly**, never click on a pop-up if you do not know what the consequences are and make sure you know exactly what you are consenting to when you agree to an end-user agreement.

**For more information and questions about spyware and other internet-related risks, go to:**

**[www.surfopsafe.nl](http://www.surfopsafe.nl) (Dutch only)**

**[www.enisa.eu.int](http://www.enisa.eu.int)**

**[www.govcert.nl](http://www.govcert.nl)**

**[www.opta.nl](http://www.opta.nl)**

This brochure is a production of the Netherlands Ministry of Economic Affairs. It is a translation of the Dutch Spyware flyer that is made available in English. This brochure can be used in all nations free of rights.

**december 2005**

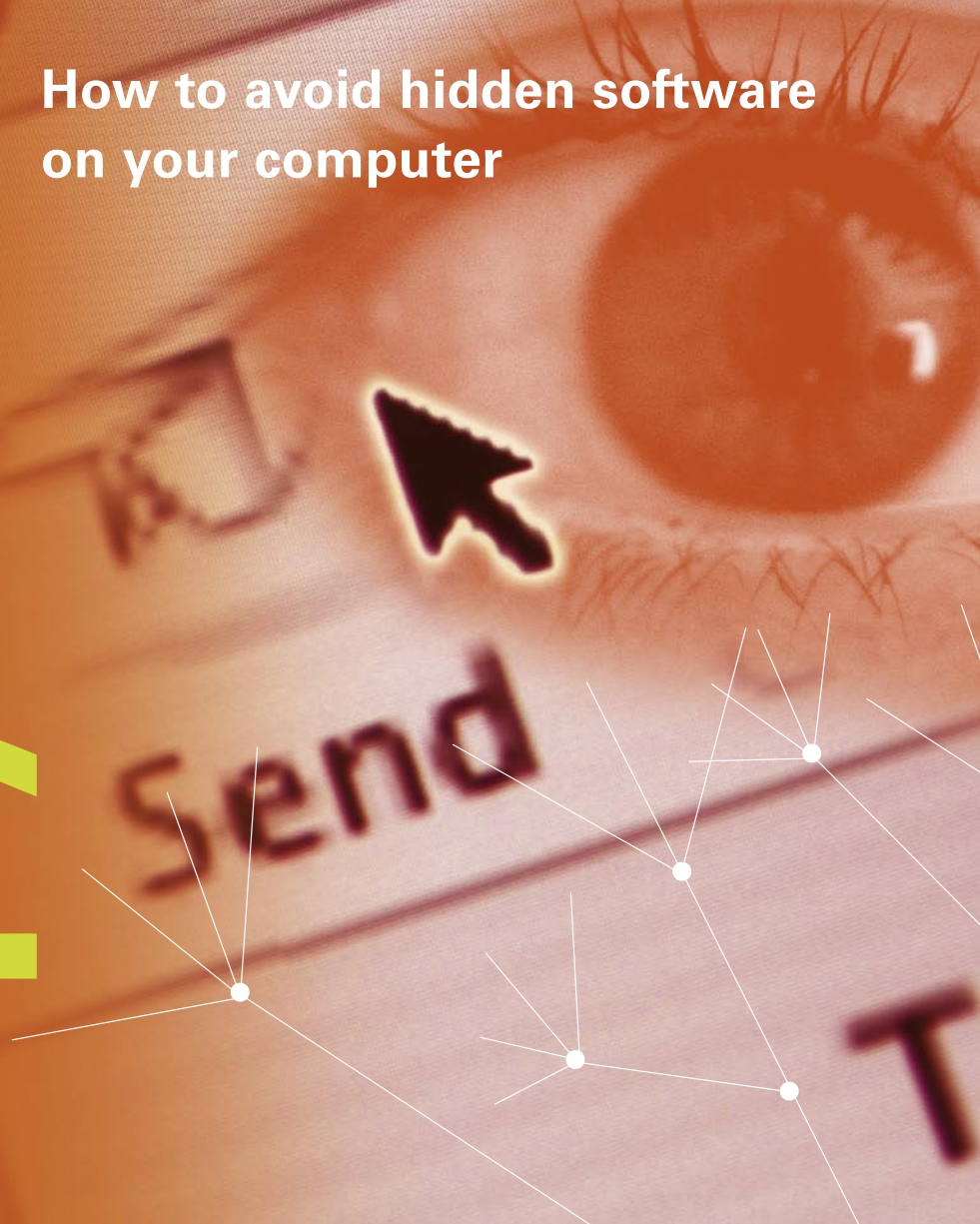


Ministry of Economic Affairs



# Spyware

How to avoid hidden software  
on your computer



**Has your computer been functioning abnormally? Do you have random internet pages or pop-ups appear out of nowhere? Has your computer dramatically slowed down or has your browser's homepage suddenly changed? This could mean that spyware has been installed on your computer.**

**But what actually is spyware? How can you find out whether your computer has been infected by spyware and how do you get rid of it? And, most important, how can you prevent your computer from being infected? This brochure provides you with brief answers to these questions.**



## What is spyware?

Spyware is software that is secretly installed on your computer that sends information to a third-party without you knowing it. This information can relate to the websites you visit, your internet shopping behaviour or the way you use search engines.

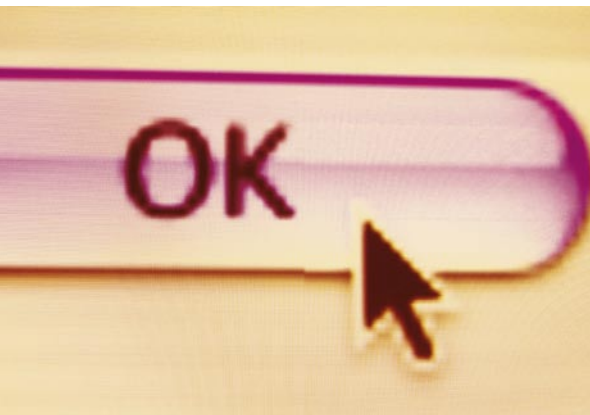
There are, however, more malevolent uses. Some types of spyware collect banking and credit card data, which are sold to criminals for big money. So spyware is not only annoying: when criminals obtain your financial data, it can also cost you a lot of money.



## Is spyware illegal?

It is illegal for others to install software or files onto your computer without informing you about their purpose. Without your prior consent websites are not allowed to collect data from your computer.

Two different authorities are authorised to deal with spyware in the Netherlands. OPTA (Independent Post and Telecommunications Agency) is responsible for monitoring compliance with telecommunication laws, which ban the sneaky installation of spyware. The CBP (Data Protection Authority) makes sure that the way private information is handled, complies with privacy-related laws.



## How do you get spyware?

- Sometimes, spyware is distributed along with free software. When installing such software, always **read the end-user agreement**. Note that removing spyware from your computer can disable such free software.
- You can install spyware by clicking on **misleading pop-up ads**.
- Some websites will try to install spyware on your computer when you visit them. You will see strange pop-ups that ask you to click on **'yes' or 'okay'**. You are particularly at risk when visiting sites that offer illegal MP3s, illegal software or free pornography.
- Spyware that has been installed on your computer can install other spyware.
- When downloading **files from peer-to-peer networks**, you run the risk of unknowingly downloading spyware.
- **E-mail attachments** can also contain spyware, so never open attachments you do not trust.

