

Play Up Outdoor Safety to Children

Review power line precautions for entire family

Warm, sunny days beckon the child in all of us to head outside and play. Families should review and stress to children to follow simple electrical safety rules for safe outdoor play.

Teach your children to follow these rules:

- Never climb trees near power lines. Even if the power lines are not touching the tree, they could touch when more weight is added to a branch.
- Fly kites and model airplanes in large, open areas like a park or a field, safely away from trees and overhead power lines. If a kite gets stuck in a tree that's near power lines, don't climb up to get it. Contact your local electric cooperative for assistance.
- Never climb a utility pole or tower.
- Don't play on or around pad-mounted electrical equipment.
- Never go into an electric substation for any reason. Electric substations contain high-voltage equipment, which can be deadly. Never rescue a pet or

retrieve a ball or toy that goes inside. Call your electric co-op instead.

When designing an outdoor play area for your children, do not install playground equipment or swimming pools underneath or near power lines. Protect all family members from serious shock and injuries by installing and using outdoor outlets with ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs). Use portable GFCIs for outdoor outlets that don't have them. Be careful using electrical appliances outdoors, even if plugged into GFCI-equipped outlets.

Water always attracts kids, but water and electricity never mix. Teach older children to exercise caution before plugging in a radio, CD player, or any electrical gadget outdoors, and keep all electrical appliances at least ten feet away

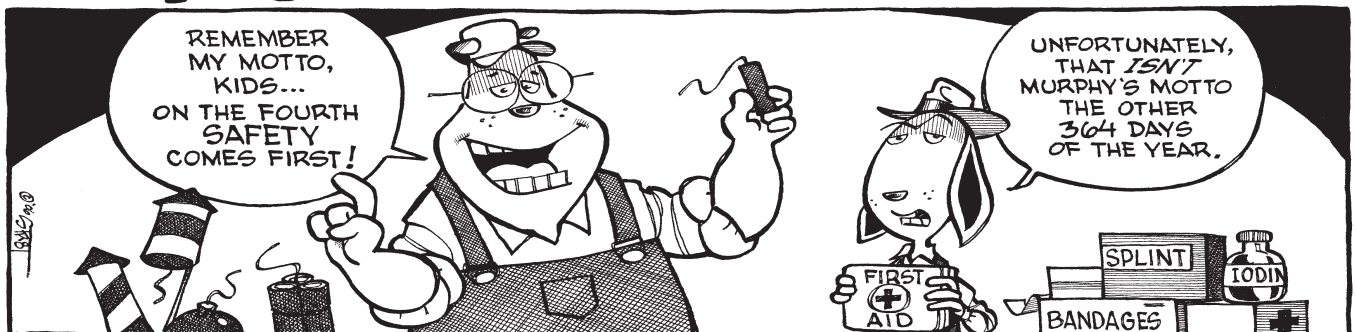


from hot tubs, pools, ponds, puddles, and wet surfaces.

Spring showers can bring more than tempting puddles for kids to splash in. They can also leave electric hazards behind. Flooded areas are never safe spots to wade or play in, and may be in contact with energized electrical equipment or fallen power lines.

Make sure all of your family members know to stay away from downed power lines, and tell children to report any fallen or dangling wires to an adult.

Murphy



Spyware: Who's Watching YOU?



Russell Gall
Charles Mix
Electric

Technology has always captivated my attention, but being a paranoid computer user was never my intention. My paranoia is one of those quirky things I've developed from years of dealing with computers in the workplace, and from helping Internet customers. Don't get me wrong; I'm not someone who believes that my computer is spying on me for the Feds, or that silent, black helicopters are circling my house at night. But, there is definitely potential for my web-browsing habits, or even my personal information, to be "out there" for the world to see. So,

it's not surprising that I'm a little bit more than psychotic when it comes to the topic of spyware.

Spyware, by definition, is: any software that covertly gathers user information through the user's Internet connection without his or her knowledge, usually for advertising purposes. This is done by several methods, and can be obvious or completely stealthy.

For example, did you ever find it peculiar that after searching for something online, you see all sorts of ads that seem to relate to that search? It's because searches and subsequent web sites that you visit are tracking where you visit and then influencing what you see. Here's a little experiment: Go to google.com and search "car loans". From the search results, pick a site and browse to it. Now open your favorite weather website and enter your zip code to get your local weather. Notice anything about what advertisements are on that page? It's no coincidence that it most likely will be an auto advertisement.

Another source of exposure is those seemingly benign search bars installed at the top of your web browser. My Web Search, Google, and Yahoo all keep track of sites you visit on the Internet, and then report back to a database to target you for future advertisement. To think that you actually okayed the installation of that search bar!

Spyware can steal your sensitive data, and increase those pain-in-the-neck pop-up ads.



Emails are another notorious source of spyware. Most Internet service providers will filter out potential threats, like viruses and Trojan horses, to help protect computers. But, spyware is something that is truly out of control. There are umpteen ways to craftily camouflage the little 'bots that are used to report email addresses back to spammers. How about those nifty little emoticons that always show up on the bottom of an email forwarded from your coworker's friend's uncle's sister's friend's brother-in-law? Those are a good indication that your email has just been added to some mail list for the world to SPAM. Once they have your email address, look out. You're in for a fun-filled adventure every time you get email.

Lastly, there are programs that can be loaded on to your computer through email or malicious websites without your knowledge. Once the computer is infected, the program can send mass emails to everyone in your address book, or send out personal information located on your computer.

Is your personal information out there for the the world to see?

To protect your computer, start out with good anti-virus software. This will eliminate most of the big threats that can turn your computer into a \$2,000 boat anchor. Keeping it up-to-date is important, too, so set it to check for daily updates. A good, free anti-virus program can be found at <http://avast.com/eng/download-avast-home.html>.

Next, download a couple of free software programs to scan your computer for spyware. Two that I recommend are "Spybot Search and Destroy", and "AdAware". Both can be downloaded for free at <http://www.download.com>. Watch out, though: there are a lot of software programs for removing spyware that come at a price. In my experience, none of these work as well as the free ones. Once you have installed a program, scan your computer once a week and marvel at what it finds.

To protect email, try downloading a free program called "mailwasher". It enables you to blacklist common offenders by domain name, and lets you whitelist those addresses you wish to accept. Find it at <http://download.com>.

To cap off this article, I'd like to throw out one more little piece of advice: If you want to forward a clever email on to your sister in Sheboygan, please have the courtesy to clean it up first. Nothing is more annoying to me than to have to open an attachment of an attachment of an attachment to get to an email. Only then do I realize how I'll have good luck if I forward the email to 13.5 people and send it back to the guy who sent it to me to confirm I am a good friend. If that's what it takes, call me Schleprock, your former friend. ;-)