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Spying on Americans before 9/11: NSA Built Back Door In All Windows Software by 1999

Government Spooks and Microsoft Inc

By Washington's Blog
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Government Built Spy-Access Into Most Popular Consumer Program Before 9/11

In researching the stunning pervasiveness of spying by the government (it's much more wide spread than you've heard even now), we ran across the fact that the FBI wants software programmers to install a backdoor in *all* software.

Digging a little further, we found a 1999 article by leading European computer publication Heise which noted that the NSA had *already* built a backdoor into all Windows software:

> A careless mistake by Microsoft programmers has revealed that special access codes prepared by the US National Security Agency have been secretly built into Windows. The NSA access system is built into every version of the Windows operating system now in use, except early releases of Windows 95 (and its predecessors). The discovery comes close on the heels of the revelations earlier this year that another US software giant, Lotus, had built an NSA "help information" trapdoor into its Notes system, and that security functions on other software systems had been deliberately crippled.
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> The first discovery of the new NSA access system was made two years ago by British researcher Dr Nicko van Someren [an expert in computer security]. But it was only a few weeks ago when a second researcher rediscovered the access system. With it, he found the evidence linking it to NSA.
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> Two weeks ago, a US security company came up with conclusive evidence that the second key belongs to NSA. Like Dr van Someren, Andrew Fernandez, chief scientist with Cryptonym of Morrisville, North Carolina, had been probing the presence and significance of the two keys. Then he checked the latest Service Pack release for Windows NT4, Service Pack 5. He found that Microsoft's developers had failed to remove or "strip" the debugging symbols used to test this software before they released it. Inside the code were the labels for the two keys. One was called "KEY". The other was called "NSAKEY".
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> Fernandes reported his re-discovery of the two CAPI keys, and their secret meaning, to "Advances in Cryptology, Crypto'99″ conference held in Santa Barbara. According to those present at the conference, Windows developers attending the conference did not deny that the "NSA" key was built into their software. But they refused to talk about what the key did, or why it had been put there without users' knowledge.

A third key?!

But according to two witnesses attending the conference, even Microsoft's top crypto programmers were astonished to learn that the version of ADVAPI.DLL shipping with Windows 2000 contains not two, but three keys. Brian LaMachia, head of CAPI development at Microsoft was "stunned" to learn of these discoveries, by outsiders. The latest discovery by Dr van Someren is based on advanced search methods which test and report on the "entropy" of programming code.

Within the Microsoft organisation, access to Windows source code is said to be highly compartmentalized, making it easy for modifications to be inserted without the knowledge of even the respective product managers.

Researchers are divided about whether the NSA key could be intended to let US government users of Windows run classified cryptosystems on their machines or whether it is intended to open up anyone's and everyone's Windows computer to intelligence gathering techniques deployed by NSA's burgeoning corps of "information warriors".

According to Fernandez of Cryptonym, the result of having the secret key inside your Windows operating system "is that it is tremendously easier for the NSA to load unauthorized security services on all copies of Microsoft Windows, and once these security services are loaded, they can effectively compromise your entire operating system". The NSA key is contained inside all versions of Windows from Windows 95 OSR2 onwards.

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"How is an IT manager to feel when they learn that in every copy of Windows sold, Microsoft has a 'back door' for NSA – making it orders of magnitude easier for the US government to access your computer?" he asked.

We have repeatedly pointed out that widespread spying on Americans began *prior to 9/11*.

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