

# THIS & THAT

by



Bob Lunaburg

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q.** How safe is my computer from Internet attack?

**A.** It all depends. Don't you just hate it when someone answers a question like that?

Really though, it's like how safe you are while taking a walk. You are pretty darn safe if you don't walk at all, and in big danger when you walk alone after dark in the very shady parts of town.

Of course if you are not connected to an ISP (Internet Service Provider) your computer is safe from the 'net. There's no way anyone can probe your computer from the Internet if you're not connected to it. It's the same as the idea that no one can talk to you on the phone unless you are connected.

Now, when you are connected to the 'net, you are vulnerable. At those times it's fair to ask, "Just how vulnerable?"

Without a *firewall* on your computer, someone can probe it whenever you are connected to the 'net. But, hold on a second. I guess the question should be, "Who would want to probe my computer and why?"

Well, if I was wealthy, kept all my financial records and access to all my financial accounts on my computer, I would probably have cause to worry.

The other thing is if I store my credit card numbers, user identifications and passwords on my computer I am vulnerable to a *cookie* search (cookies are one place where that kind of information is stored)...which would allow hackers access to that information.

All this having been said, the same thing is true when I'm out walking. I could be mugged, robbed, and otherwise violated just because I'm out walking.

I guess the way I look at it is, "Who's out there, in my neighborhood, looking to get me? "Sometimes I tease myself with the thought of all the excitement it would cause in my otherwise dull life if they did.

The truth is I don't have anything worth stealing on my computer, and I'm not rich or big enough to be drawn attention to.

But, (oh that *but* word again) there is another kind of problem we could experience from the 'net. It comes in the form of a virus linked URL (Universal Resource Locator). Each time you look at a web page, you see links which when clicked on take you to other places on the 'net. Links can point to computer virus transferring programs. The standard virus-checking program will not detect these URLs. A *firewall*, such as comes with Norton's home Security system, will detect and protect you from that kind of problem.

I use a *firewall*. I do a lot of surfing...I mean a lot. I am always looking for new stuff for our courses. I feel I need the protection.

In fact, my computers are all protected by virus checkers and firewalls. And I do update them at least once a month. But, my risk is high. When I was a sometimes 'net surfer, and only opened email from people I know. I had

a virus checker, but did not have a *firewall*.

**Q.** What's a *firewall*?

**A.** A *firewall* is a program set up to screen any unsolicited computer signals or known infected links from gaining access to a computer.

When you have a *firewall*, all access you make to the Internet is logged, and only those signals that come in response to your requests are allowed to pass through and into your computer. And, even if you do accidentally receive an infected URL, it too will be blocked.

Two things you need to know: 1. Computers and Internet service provider software does not come with a *firewall* program, and 2. Virus checking software does not include a *firewall*.

I use Norton's Internet Security 2000 (the Family Edition) protection on my computers just in case.