♚ Computer Security ♚

The Holiday Gift That Keeps On Giving: Computer Security

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(NAPSA)—If you're planning to buy or think you may receive a new PC this holiday season, you'll want to learn how to protect it from online hazards right out of the box. And just as it's important to make sure your car operates as safely as possible by seeing that it receives tune-ups and oil changes on a timely basis, it's also important to make sure that your new PC is as secure and safe as possible.

Although Microsoft Corp. and other software companies typically provide computer manufacturers with the most recently updated software each month, harmful threats can develop in the time between the manufacture and sale of a computer. That means the new PC could be at risk from the first moment it connects to the Internet.

Fortunately, however, many new computers come loaded with some protection. PCs running the Microsoft Windows XP operating system include a built-in firewall that helps shield them from online threats such as those caused by viruses, worms, Trojan horses or hackers, and also helps ensure the protection of personal information online. This firewall is not always "on" by default, but turning it on is a straightforward procedure.

"I urge everyone who gets a new computer to turn on the built-in firewall even before connecting to the Internet for the first time," said Will Poole, vice president of Windows at Microsoft. "Given the impact of viruses, it's well worth the few seconds it takes to activate it."

Turning on the firewall is the first of three steps Microsoft recommends to establish more-secure online computing and to help prevent personal information from being inappropriately disclosed online. The second step is to download all available updates to the computer's operating system, to help ensure that it's up to date. The third step is to install a current anti-virus program.

In Windows XP, turning on the Internet Connection Firewall is easy:

• From the Start menu, click on Control Panel.

• Click on Network and Internet Connections.

• Look for the Network Connections icon and click on it.

• Right-click on the dial-up or broadband connection you plan to use and click on Properties.

• In the resulting menu, select the Advanced tab.

• Click to place a check mark in the box that reads, "Protect my computer and network by limiting or preventing access to this computer from the Internet."

After turning on the firewall, users can then use the Internet to update the software loaded on their PC. These updates often include patches for any vulnerabilities in the PC's preloaded software. Windows-based PC users can visit http://windowsupdate. microsoft.com to learn about and download any needed updates.

Information about increasing the safety of your computer is available on the Protect Your PC site at http://www.microsoft. com/security/protect. Visitors also can access a tool that will walk them through steps to help keep their PCs more secure. In addition, Windows XP users can use this tool to automatically enable the Internet Connection Firewall and set up the Automatic Updates feature.

It is important to note that, although the firewall needs to be turned on only once, anti-virus software is most effective only if updated regularly, even daily. This helps ensure that your computer can recognize and defend itself against the most recent threats to PC security and personal information. Similarly, the presence of regularly updated operating system software helps ensure that any subsequently uncovered weaknesses can be corrected. By using current technology to stay ahead of contemporary threats, you can, with a few simple, regularly performed measures, help ensure that your PC and your personal information are protected.