Computer Corner

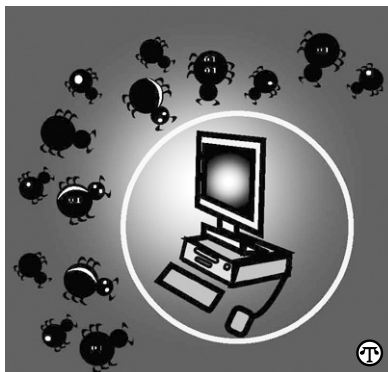## Protecting Yourself Against Electronic Intruders

(NAPSA)—Do you know what evil lurks inside your PC? If you've spent any time on the Internet, chances are you've encountered spyware but you might not even know it.

Defining the disease

Spyware is a software pest that can install itself without your knowledge or consent, track your personal information including credit card and bank account data, and wreak havoc on your PC. Spyware can be delivered through pop-up ads or through software downloads. Though some of these pests are merely annoying, serving targeted ads based on what you are looking at on the Web, other types of spyware are more dangerous, with the potential to manipulate finances and ruin credit ratings.

Diagnosing the patient

If you're experiencing PC slowdowns or pop-up ads, chances are you've downloaded spyware. The first step to prevention is diagnosis. The editors at CNET Download.com, a library of thousands of free and free-to-try software downloads, recommend a few tools to help diagnose and eliminate spyware. Ad-Aware and Spybot—Search and Destroy are the most popular tools for spyware detection and removal. Even better, both are free. These programs will scan your system and show you exactly what's lurking on your PC, then remove the pests it has found. Be warned, though, some spyware changes your registry and start-up preferences, so you might experience some performance problems even after you've cleaned your system.

Stamping out spyware may be easier—and more important—than many people realize.

Preventing future infections

Though most anti-spyware solutions focus on stamping out existing spyware, some newcomers promise to eliminate spyware threats before they take hold. Webroot Spy Sweeper and Spyware Doctor get high marks from the Download.com editors for their ability to quarantine new spyware threats before they become installed on your computer. You can find free trials of both these products on Download.com.

Stay safe

Unfortunately, spyware is growing more sophisticated every day, so you should watch what you download. The software available through Download.com has been tested for undisclosed adware, and has been determined to be spyware-free, but the Download.com editors still recommend that you establish a habit of reading your installation agreement carefully when you do install new software, as it might contain a hidden agenda. For more tips and tools on how to prevent spyware invaders, visit www.download.com.