

Encryption code to stop e-mail snoops at KSU

THE COLLEGIAN
Kansas State U.<body>

(U-WIRE) MANHATTAN, Kan. — The vast majority of e-mail is seen only by the sender and the receiver, but that may not always be the case.

Ken Conrow, interim director of Computing and Network Services said "most of the privacy comes from the fact that there is way too much for anyone to snoop."

"It is and it is not private."

Most networks are not secure, so if people want to plug in, they can, he said. If someone is deliberately snooping at the network level, he can do so.

Most frequently it is an unintentional mistake which results in e-mail being read by someone other than the sender or receiver.

"If mail gets misdirected, it goes to sort of a dead-letter box, so it could be read by someone else," Conrow said. "Sometimes people will send us something as an example of what went wrong, and they will send the whole kit and caboodle, including their e-mail and the error message."

Conrow said courts can insist any record of e-mail be supplied to them, which means e-mail is not private in the legal sense. If a company systematically archives all the e-mail, then a court can support a request for e-mail.

At K-State, backups are made on a daily basis, but not with the purpose of archiving e-mail.

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"We are not organized to back up e-mail, and it would be a real job for anyone to pick out any e-mail," Conrow said.

One way to protect e-mail is with Pretty Good Privacy. This is an encryption key that can be used to ensure a greater level of privacy. If e-mail users want to, they can download PGP from an Internet site, said Ralph Wasmer, consulting manager for CNS.

Senders can tell people they mail what their PGP key is. The PGP key encrypts your messages, Conrow said. There are hundreds of sites for PGP through Netscape, and a search on America Online revealed 256 entries for PGP, he said. Wasmer recommended the MIT site as the official one.

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