

Computer users warned of virus

By JOSH KNAUB
Staff writer

A particularly prolific virus threatened e-mail users this week, but local officials said preventive practices could stop others from passing the bug.

The virus, referred to as "Melissa," can infect only Microsoft Office products, such as Microsoft Word and Microsoft Outlook.

The virus, one of the fastest spreading in history, is passed by an e-mail message with the subject line "An important message from ..." and an attached Word document. Reading the message will not release the virus, but opening the attached document will.

Once activated, Melissa selects 50 names from the user's Outlook address book and sends itself to those users, starting the process anew.

Melissa disturbed e-mail systems at several large corporations Monday, including Microsoft, Intel and Dell

Computer.

Bill Hayes, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln computer lab superintendent, has been in contact with other university information technology staff. So far no one has reported an infection.

"Right now all is quiet," he said.

The FBI is conducting an investigation to determine who is responsible for Melissa, according to a ZDNet report Tuesday. The virus was apparently launched from infected files posted to the Internet discussion group alt.sex, according to the ZDNet Web site.

Hayes emphasized that users who do not use Outlook as an e-mail program cannot spread the virus.

"If Outlook isn't there, you've got an infected version of Word. Period," Hayes said.

Hayes said the best defense against Melissa and other viruses of its kind, called macro viruses, is to simply not open attachments.

Another important protection against viruses is a virus scanning pro-

"Our technical support will tell you not to open these attachments. After that it's user choice."

MARC HASSMAN
computer consultant

gram. Hayes said virus scanning programs were available for downloading or from the UNL computer shop located in the 501 building.

Lincoln Internet service providers reported no effects from the virus Tuesday. Officials at Navix, Internet Nebraska and Radiks Internet Access said they had not noticed any disturbance associated with the virus.

Lela Kelliher of Aliant Communications said no one had reported infection from Melissa as of Tuesday afternoon.

Kelliher said that customers who called technical support for advice

about Melissa were given basic information and referred to Internet resources for more specific questions.

Marc Hassman of Radiks said Tuesday afternoon Melissa had had "no effect" on his company's computers.

"Our technical support will tell you not to open these attachments. After that it's a user choice," he said.

Hayes said the best defense against viruses, and computer problems in general, is user knowledge of computers.

"Many users approach computers as if they were toasters," he said. "Users need to understand the things that can harm their systems."

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Senate wants out of compact

■ Nebraska senators move to withdraw from the five-state waste compact.

By JESSICA FARGEN
Senior staff writer

Two years ago, when senators considered getting out of a five-state waste compact because Nebraska was chosen to house the waste, senators were leery of the pricey consequences of withdrawal.

So the state stayed in the Central Interstate Low-Level Radioactive Waste Compact.

But Tuesday, bolstered by a recent law opinion that says Nebraska would not be penalized for withdrawing, senators gave first round approval 37-0 to withdraw from the compact.

Gov. Mike Johanns said he was leaning toward signing the bill if it passes the remaining two rounds of debate and lands on his desk.

Under LB530, sponsored by Ewing Sen. Cap Dierks, Nebraska would withdraw from the compact, which includes Kansas, Louisiana, Arkansas and Oklahoma. According to a Washington, D.C., law firm, the state would be obligated to pay its current annual fee of \$25,000 for five more years, then would be free of the compact.

Since Boyd County, located in northeastern Nebraska near the South Dakota border, was chosen as the site in 1989, county residents and the state have wrangled with the issue of staying

in the compact.

But fear that exiting the compact would result in millions of dollars in litigation kept the state in the compact.

During the hour-long debate, no senators spoke in opposition to the bill, saying that the time was right to get out of the compact.

Last year the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality denied a license for the site.

Dierks said the \$94 million project has dragged on long enough.

"It is time for Nebraska to stand up for itself and end this madness and withdraw from the compact," Dierks said.

Speaker Doug Kristensen of Minden said the nation's need for low-level waste sites has dwindled in the 20 years since the conception of nationwide waste compacts. Nebraska currently ships its low-level waste to a South Carolina site.

Any litigation resulting from site withdrawal would not be linked to LB530, several senators said. But the fear of litigation was still there, Kristensen said.

A lawsuit alleging Nebraska did not act in good faith in denying a permit to build the site is pending in federal court, Kristensen said.

Lincoln Sen. Chris Beutler said Nebraska had acted in good faith long enough.

"We have operated in better faith than any other compact that I know of," he said. "Nowhere in this country is there a licensing process that is truly in motion in any of the compact states."

Dierks said Boyd County residents

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had suffered enough "broken hearts and misbehavior" as a result of the compact.

Sen. Ed Schrock of Elm Creek agreed.

"May no one here have to go through what goes on in Boyd County," Schrock said. "It's time we withdraw. This has been a flawed process since day one."

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Smoking bill signed into law by Johanns

From staff reports

Gov. Mike Johanns signed three bills into law Tuesday morning, including one that bans smoking in state vehicles and buildings.

The governor held a signing ceremony Wednesday for LBs 211, 40 and 49. LB211 was originally intended to ban smoking in the state Capitol building, but the bill's focus grew to encompass state vehicles and most state buildings, including 40 percent of university residence hall rooms.

Johanns thanked Sens. Jerry Schmitt of Ord, Don Preister of Omaha and Floyd Vrtiska of Table Rock for their work in getting the bill passed.

"I get the easy part," Johanns said. "I just show up and sign it."

Schmitt introduced the bill this year. Preister had introduced similar measures in years past. Vrtiska worked with Preister on past legislation.

Vrtiska accidentally referred to the

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governor as Sen. Johanns.

Johanns joked about the slip being a promotion.

"Can I be on the Revenue Committee?" he asked. His property tax rebate plan, LB881, has been stuck in the Revenue Committee since its hearing in February.

The other bills Johanns signed are part of a crime package.

LB40 enhances the penalties for being an accessory to a felony. LB49 makes it a criminal offense to entice a child into a car or building.

Omaha Sen. Kermit Brashear, who introduced both bills, said the first bill is a more effective way of dealing with gangs than trying to identify gang members. The second bill, he said, was a response to requests from the courts.

"We've simply done that in the interest of our children," he said.

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