



'Stop. Think. Connect.' helps keep our virtual gates secure

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10/12/2010 - **WASHINGTON (AFNS)** -- If your biggest cyberspace worry is that your mom or boss will see that embarrassing Facebook photo of you flailing in the conga line during last weekend's party, think again.

Technology has exponentially advanced the way we communicate, but the natural trade-off is the heightened need for cybersecurity, particularly the need as total force Airmen, and citizens, to protect our cyber network.

October is National Cybersecurity Awareness Month, and a proclamation released by President Barack Obama said all Americans must understand their responsibility to secure cyber networks. This includes creating strong, varying passwords, proper computer disposal, phishing avoidance and more. The theme, "Stop. Think. Connect." highlights keener awareness and "provides an opportunity to learn more about the importance of cybersecurity."

P@ssw0rds, er, pāSSwerds! I mean Pa\$\$w%rds!

With cryptic, hieroglyphic symbols and letter combinations on various sticky notes, I can't tell you how many times I've pulled my hair out, wondering how anyone can think "NerpTrop123" is a weak password because it's too close to a real word. I've come up with what I'm sure are entire new languages during the password reset process.

And, I'll bet many users share my frustration, thinking, this is nuts! It's me, not the hackers, who always seems to be "locked out" of my computer because I can't ever remember my ever-expiring passwords.

Change your desktop, laptop home and office passwords frequently.

A strong password doesn't have to be hard to remember. It just needs to be hard to guess. Simple phrases can become upper and lower case letters, numbers and symbols, which help deter some hackers who can go through every word in the dictionary to guess your password.

For example, I love cheeseburgers could magically become "l<3CHzeBRgr\$."

Wipe out!

You wouldn't junk or sell a car with all your personal information in it, right? And so it goes for computers.

According to Onguard Online, when you delete a file, the links between the index and the file disappear, signaling to your system that the file isn't needed any longer, and that hard drive space can be overwritten. However, the bits and pieces of the deleted file stay on your computer until they're overwritten, and they can be retrieved with a data recovery program. To remove data from your hard drive permanently, it needs to be wiped clean.

You can use online and store-bought software to wipe your personal hard drive clean when you sell or dispose of a computer. Network administrators will wipe government computers that are on their way to disposal or new homes. For personal units, just remember to back up everything you care to keep to an external drive such as a USB drive, a CD-ROM, or an external hard drive, or transfer them to a new computer.

Yeah, about that \$8 million overseas wire transfer ...

While it may be flattering to think that the mysteriously wealthy refugee of a rogue nation has selected you and only you for which to deposit his millions in currency, you can count on this situation nearly always being a phishing scam.

Never reply to an e-mail, text or pop-up message that asks for personal or financial information, and don't click on links in the message. If you want to go to a bank or business's website, actually type -- not cut and paste -- the web address into your browser. Don't play foreign lotteries and don't believe you've won one if you've never played.

Remember that wiring money is like sending cash: once it's gone, it's irretrievable.

Finally, never, ever agree to deposit a check from someone you don't know and then wire money back to them.

Onguard Online has many more tips to keep you cyber savvy.

Visit <http://www.onguardonline.gov/> or http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2010/0410_cybersec/ for further information about cyber security.

As the president said in his proclamation, "Through this initiative, Americans can learn about and become more aware of risks in cyberspace, and be empowered to make choices that contribute to our overall security."

To read the proclamation in its entirety, visit <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/10/01/presidential-proclamation-national-cybersecurity-awareness-month>.