

## Threats to Security

Threats to computers and information systems are quite real. In previous newsletters, we've discussed hacking risks to your information systems, but this is just as small element of the big picture of threats and vulnerabilities to information security. Identifying threats are only part of the picture; once threats are identified, it is up to you to find the vulnerabilities in your information system and find ways to keep these threats from occurring.

Although threats to information systems are evolving and abundant, they can all be broken down into three categories:

**Natural Threats:** These can best be thought of as threats caused by Mother Nature—floods, quakes, tornadoes, temperature extremes, hurricanes, and storms are all examples.

**Intentional Threats:** Computer crimes are the best examples of intentional threats, or when someone purposely damages property or information. Computer crimes include espionage, identity theft, child pornography, and credit card crime.

**Unintentional Threats:** These threats basically include the unauthorized or accidental modification of software. Have you ever accidentally deleted an important file, or tripped over a power cord?

### Finding the Vulnerable Spots

Now we need to be able to determine how your information system is vulnerable to the above threats. The two main vulnerabilities to home users are to your operating system (OS) and to your Internet connection.

An OS is the program that essentially “runs” your computer. Although Microsoft Windows and Apple Mac O/S are the most well known operating systems, others that you may have heard of include Linux and UNIX. If someone knows what OS you're running on your computer, the more likely he'll be able to access your system and exploit weaknesses within it. Making sure that you frequently check for security patches and updates will help keep your system more secure.

Internet connections are also susceptible to threats. Broadband connections are more susceptible than dialups because these services are always connected to the Internet, making it easier for people to find you and take your information or send you a virus. Purchasing a firewall and an anti-virus program will help keep your information safe from attack when connected to the Internet for long periods of time.

Being aware of threats and vulnerabilities is the first step in making your information system more safe and secure. Although no system is truly safe from all threats, knowing ahead of time just what could compromise your information and becoming educated in ways of preventing these threats will make you more prepared for any attack and give you the chance to protect yourself from it.