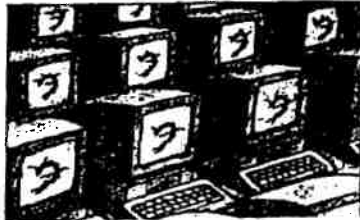


NSA and Computer Viruses

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(U) There has been considerable discussion in the Agency about computer viruses and the possibility that NSA's computers and computer networks have been invaded. In discussing the viruses, writers must be aware of the classifications that apply to the discussions.

(U) As most of us know, a computer virus is a software program designed specifically to reproduce itself and to modify or destroy computer software, damage or destroy equipment, or compromise sensitive data. Some of us, however, are unaware that any personal computer network or office automation system is susceptible to invasions by a virus, infecting any host in which the program is used. Owing to the insidious nature of a virus, any unwitting user can become an unwitting propagator.

(U) We have established classification guidelines to discuss viruses that may be summarized as follows:

(U) the fact that NSA is aware of computer viruses and that we take steps to minimize the risk of introducing viruses into our automated information systems (AIS) or networks is UNCLASSIFIED.

(U) the fact that we employ commercially produced software to scan for virus infections also is UNCLASSIFIED.

~~(FOUO)~~ an admission of vulnerability, i.e., the acknowledgment that NSA has experienced the intrusion of a computer virus in any of its systems is classified, at a minimum, CONFIDENTIAL.

~~(FOUO)~~ The disclosure of the extent of infection or the name of the specific virus that may have been discovered in an NSA AIS or network is classified, at a minimum, SECRET.

~~(FOUO)~~ Specifics concerning an infection, such as the severity of the infection, the extent of damage done, the complexity and expense of eradicating the disease, or the impact of the virus on operations is classified TOP SECRET; in some instances, if certain details concerning the AIS, the network, or the database in which the virus was discovered are revealed, any of the above revelations may require handling in COMINT channels (HVCCO) or even in codeword channels.

~~(FOUO)~~ In summary, be careful what you say and to whom you say about NSA and computer viruses. For further information concerning the classification matters pertaining to computer viruses, contact your classification advisory officer (CAO), your local Computer Security Officer or Computer Security Manager, or J06, the TCOM office of Operational Computer Security.