Spies Among Us: Criminals Want To See Every Keystroke You Make

Trying to stay on top of computer security at home can be daunting, especially for those of us who aren't very computer savvy. But at Harborstone, we're committed to helping members learn how to protect their sensitive information from threats when they use the Internet.

Of all the risks to your online privacy and security, malicious keystroke logging, also known as keylogging, is one of the most sinister.

Keylogging is usually done using a software program that records all the keystrokes entered on your PC. The software is typically downloaded onto your computer without your knowledge, often when you click on a pop-up link or visit an infected website. It transmits a record of your keystrokes back to the source. You could fall victim to this practice and never even know you've been monitored.

Unlike most other types of malware, keyloggers do not threaten your computer system itself. The threat they pose is to your privacy and financial security. Imagine the damage someone could do if they intercepted your passwords, PIN codes, account numbers, Social Security number, and other sensitive information as you typed it on your keyboard.

Using the confidential data they gather, criminals can easily transfer money from your bank account, access your email or social media accounts, and cause other fraud and mischief. In some cases, a criminal's intent may be even more threatening. Keylogger malware has been used to conduct industrial and political espionage and theft of proprietary or classified information.

For most of us, however, the biggest threat is to our personal finances. And the damage done can take years to unravel and correct.

Protect yourself

You can protect yourself from keylogging in the same way you protect yourself from other online security threats:

- Use reliable security software and keep it updated
- Use a pop-up blocker
- Download software only from websites you know and trust
- Don't open links or attachments in emails unless you know who they are from
- Set your browser security setting high enough to detect unauthorized downloads