

# Which System Messages Are Real?

*By Terry Irwin*

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There are a lot of people out there in the world that have nothing better to do than make your life more difficult and exploit your lack of computer knowledge. Honestly, that's good job security for me. Of course, that's not how I treat the issue. I'm here to take care of my customers and keep their computers running smoothly so they can keep their businesses running smoothly.

So you get an email from "System Administrator" that says some abnormal activity has been detected coming from your IP address, and the message helpfully recommends you install the attached patch to fix the problem. Should you do it? Make sure you've got my phone number on speed dial first, and maybe you should change into some coveralls first, because it's going to make a mess.

Here's the truth of the matter: This is probably the single most effective way of duping people into putting viruses on their computers voluntarily. If you're somewhat technically savvy, this plays right into your limited understanding of computing. If you have almost no technical ability, then this looks official and important, and you want to do what you can to keep from causing everyone else trouble.

Your ISP will NOT send you software in an email to fix a problem unless you contact them and specifically ask for it. Once you've spoken to a tech and determined exactly what software you need, you can expect to receive it. But they will not do it arbitrarily. Your ISP does have the ability to detect abnormal activity originating from your IP address, but they will almost always advise you that your service will be disconnected if you don't fix the problem immediately, and they may even advise you that they have tools on their web site that they provide for you to use to repair the problem. Not all ISPs make those tools available to their users, and it's not always a good idea for a business to use the tools that are provided as they are usually for home users, not businesses.

This message does not always come from an email. Some times it comes from a pop-up that appears down in the bottom-right corner of your screen. Any time you get one of these, read it carefully. If it says something bad has been detected on your computer and you can download their software to remove the harmful software, make sure you've got me on speed dial and you're wearing those coveralls again before you click on that link. More than likely, you've got spyware on your computer. How did it get there? I'll save that for another article, because it will be a lengthy one. More importantly, how do you remove it, and keep it and others like it from coming back?

To remove it, call me. I've done this so much over the last couple of years that I'm getting quite good at it. To keep it from coming back, once it's gone make sure you've got the 4 requirements of safe computing...anti-virus software, anti-spyware software, good backups, and a firewall. Not only do you have to have them, you have to keep them updated and properly configured.

Even if you're religiously following safe surfing habits, some spyware can still make it past your defenses, and there's usually a little bit of lag between when new viruses come out and new virus definitions, so you're never 100% safe.

If you are ever unsure of any message you get through email or pop-ups, please don't hesitate to call me. I'm here to help.