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NOAA Guidelines for Dealing with E-Mail Spam

April 23, 2001

Spam (aka UCE: Unsolicited Commercial E-Mail) is the Internet version of "Junk E-Mail." It is an attempt to deliver a message, over the Internet, to someone who would not otherwise choose to receive it. Almost all spam is commercial advertising. Potential target lists are created by scanning Usenet postings, stealing Internet mailing lists, or searching the Web for addresses. Such information is gathered with automated searches to retrieve E-Mail addresses for spamming.

The low cost of E-Mail spamming engines offered for sale with millions of E-Mail addresses, coupled with the fact that the sender does not pay extra to send E-Mail, has resulted in the current explosive growth of "junk E-Mail." Currently, unless the spammer offers to sell illegal items, there is no legal remedy to use to stop E-Mail spammers.

Several bills have been introduced in Congress to deal with this problem.
For information on their status, go to:
http://www.cauce.org.

If you receive mail in your NOAA mailbox, there are varying ways to deal with it.
The easiest and most obvious is to simply delete it.

If, however, you feel that the message refers to something illegal or offensive (pornography), or you find it threatening, please notify your local IT security contact and/or email administrator. Either they or you should then forward it to abuse@noaa.gov. Also, if the spam asks you to open a bank account to deposit large sums of money usually associated with an oil deal and/or the Nigerian or other government, you must report it. (for more information, see:
http://www.treas.gov/usss/index.htm?alert419.htm&1)

When sending these messages, always include complete mail headers. Instructions for doing this with Netscape Messenger can be found here. The complete header information must be included since the return address almost never reflects the sender's identity.

DO NOT TRY TO DEAL WITH THE SPAM YOURSELF

- DO NOT reply to the spammer. The sender address is almost always not an actual address. If it is a working address, the spammer may be using it to simply verify that your email address is valid.

- For the same reason, DO NOT follow instructions in the spam for getting yourself "removed" from their list. This includes sending a message to another address or going to a "removal" website.
- DO NOT use spam reporting services outside of NOAA (such as "spamcop"). These services are easily misused, and NOAA employees have accidentally implicated NOAA servers in spamming, thus submitting those servers for consideration to blacklisting databases.
- DO NOT spam, mail bomb, or hack spammers. In many cases the site indicated as the source of the spamming is not the spammers real site, so attacking that site is not only wrong, but you are actually "spamming" yourself.
- DO NOT go to websites that the spammer may be advertising. Alot of information can be gathered by web sites, not to mention the fact that the sites may actually contain malicous code that could damage your computer.

While NOAA has the capability to filter messages as they come in from the Internet, spam is extremely hard to block. No matter what anti-spam websites say, it's impractical to scan for phrases or addresses that are used in messages, or servers that may be used to send spam, since these can easily be changed. Efforts have been made to create huge blacklists of servers known to be used for spam distribution, but many of these servers have been used without the owner's permission, and may actually have legitimate reasons to send email into NOAA.

Spammers usually expect to send out messages until they get caught; when that happens, they simply move on to another ISP and find another server to distribute their messages.

If you are interested in filtering spam at your desktop, or at your local site, actual implementation of filtering methodologies can be found at http://spam.abuse.net./tools/mailblock.html#filters. This site includes information on filtering mail to your personal account, blocking spam E-Mail for an entire site, blocking IP connectivity from spam sites, and other tools and techniques for limiting spam.

Fight Spam on the Internet - http://spam.abuse.net

How to forward messages with complete SMTP headers from Netscape Messenger:

This is best done by forwarding messages "Inline". In Netscape Communicator/Messenger, choose "Headers" and "All" from the "View" Menu. Then, click on and hold the "Forward" button. A dropdown menu will appear. Drag the cursor to "Inline" and choose it.

Instead of clicking on the Forward button, you can also right-click the message you want to forward to abuse@noaa.gov. A menu will appear, and you can choose "Forward Inline".

Messages formatted like this can easily be cut and pasted into new messages by the abuse team to be sent to Service Providers.

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