

Name: _____

McAfee antivirus program goes berserk, freezes PCs

By PETER SVENSSON, AP Technology Writer Peter Svensson, Ap Technology Writer Wed Apr 21, 5:45 pm ET

NEW YORK – Computers in companies, hospitals and schools around the world got stuck repeatedly rebooting themselves Wednesday after an antivirus program identified a normal Windows file as a virus.

McAfee Inc. confirmed that a software update it posted at 9 a.m. Eastern time caused its antivirus program for corporate customers to misidentify a harmless file. It has posted a replacement update for download.

McAfee could not say how many computers were affected, but judging by online postings, the number was at least in the thousands and possibly in the hundreds of thousands.

McAfee said it did not appear that consumer versions of its software caused similar problems. It is investigating how the error happened "and will take measures" to prevent it from recurring, the company said in a statement.

The computer problem forced about a third of the hospitals in Rhode Island to postpone elective surgeries and stop treating patients without traumas in emergency rooms, said Nancy Jean, a spokeswoman for the Lifespan system of hospitals. The system includes Rhode Island Hospital, the state's largest, and Newport Hospital. Jean said patients who required treatment for gunshot wounds, car accidents, blunt trauma and other potentially fatal injuries were still being admitted to the emergency rooms.

In Kentucky, state police were told to shut down the computers in their patrol cars as technicians tried to fix the problem. The National Science Foundation headquarters in Arlington, Va., also lost computer access.

Intel Corp. appeared to be among the victims, according to employee posts on Twitter. Intel did not immediately return calls for comment.

Peter Juvinal, systems administrator at Illinois State University in Normal, said that when the first computer started rebooting it quickly became evident that it was a major problem, affecting dozens of computers at the College of Business alone.

"I originally thought it was a virus," he said. When the tech support people concluded McAfee's update was to blame, they stopped further downloads of the faulty software update and started shuttling from computer to computer to get the machines working again.

In many offices, personal attention to each PC from a technician appeared to be the only way to fix the problem because the computers weren't receptive to remote software updates when stuck in the reboot cycle. That slowed the recovery.

It's not uncommon for antivirus programs to misidentify legitimate files as viruses. Last month, antivirus software from Bitdefender locked up PCs running several different versions of Windows.

However, the scale of this outage was unusual, said Mike Rothman, president of computer security firm Securosis.

"It looks to be a train wreck," Rothman said.

You have users who cannot do their work . . . this is **YOUR** problem! What immediate actions could you take to rectify the problem?

Do you think this is the first time that anything like this has ever happened before? Do you think something like this will ever happen again? What lesson can network/system administrators learn from this current news event?

What could you have done before the problem arose to mitigate the damage done to your company?
