

Taiwan's first ever political computer virus

According to local media reports in the Kaohsiung region of Taiwan, the country's first ever virus named after a local political party has recently emerged. *The China Post* reveals that the virus is dubbed 'New Party'. It appears after a computer has been booted and left unused for 10 minutes. When the virus activates it produces the words "New Party Love You" and "New Party The Best Choice" on the screen and the computer is frozen, with the words for the New Party written in Chinese and the remainder in English.

The virus was written by someone called 'Chungyuan One Red Point', naming himself after a popular hero character from traditional puppet theatre who was such a good killer that he would only leave one small, red point on the forehead of his enemies. Although the virus appears to be the variety that destroys data stored on the hard disk, actually it is harmless and can be easily erased. The virus, which buries itself in the IO.SYS file of the DOS directory, can easily be eliminated by shutting off the computer, restarting it with a clean disk, and typing in SYS C: with a space between SYS and C.

Exceptionally virulent Rainbows

A new virus has been discovered which is said to be exceptionally virulent and quickly spreading. *Virus Bulletin* reveals that the multipartite virus 'Rainbow' resides in the boot sector and in executable files and spreads through partitions and directories. Once infected PCs will no longer boot from a floppy disk. An attempt to start from a floppy results in a system hang. The virus infects the master boot sector of hard disks, the DOS boot sector of floppy disks and files with EXE-type structure. The virus modifies the original Partition Table so that the operating system goes into an endless loop in the middle of the boot sequence. The operating system loader carries on investigating the same infected part of the sector continuously. Infected PCs will no longer run Windows and may have extreme difficulty booting from a floppy disk.

Press Virus Advice Line

In the UK, Reflex Magnetics has launched a Press Virus Advice Line for journalists. This is because journalists come into contact with a large number of disks, CD-ROMs and download a large number of files and are therefore thought to be a high-risk target for computer viruses. *The number for the Press Virus Advice Line is 0171 328 1044.*

The IBM virus antidote

Computerworld reports that in IBM's High Integrity Computer Laboratory a PC is examining the latest batch of computer viruses, which come in from all over the world at the rate of 20-25 a week. The automated triage — in which a bit stream is determined to be a known virus, an unknown virus or not a virus at all — is part of a multimillion-dollar research project that IBM claim will lead to an automated immune system for computers patterned on biological processes.

The frequency of new computer viruses has held relatively constant for the past several years, but there is concern. Viruses are acquiring the ability to spread at light speeds as computers become more and more networked. Emerging mobile intelligent agents, which prowl networks looking for information have the potential to spread a virus around the world in hours. IBM's research is aimed at automating the tedious manual effort now required to analyze new viruses and develop protections against them. IBM is also developing ways to automatically propagate this information to other machines in a network in a kind of mass electronic immunization.

When the automated immune system is commercially available in a couple of years, part of it will exist in user machines in the Anti-Virus product, and part will run as a service at IBM. Computer virus expert Peter Tippett of the National Computer Security Association said that IBM is ahead of other vendors in automating the derivation of code for virus removal and repair. However, although the new capabilities would be useful only in the tiniest fraction of virus attacks, "people want products that will get every last virus".