

Editorial

Fire alarms aren't for fun and games

Do you remember why you came to college? It was obviously to hear the beautiful melody of fire alarms, ringing multiple times throughout the dark hours of the morning. To have your Community Adviser herd you outside to wait in anything from heat and humidity, to a cold, snowy blizzard until the fire department gives you permission to re-enter the building.

Or so you'd think, given how often that tends to happen to students in the residence halls. But yesterday, this wonder of college life extended beyond the dorms to MacKay Hall as students were beginning their classes for the day.

While I'm sure we could all use the extra exercise of walking quickly and carefully out of our favorite classroom or dorm room to heed the fire marshal's orders, it isn't everyone's favorite way to get in those additional workout minutes. Perhaps students would be discouraged from abusing the Friley alarms if they were forced to do a few laps around the building while waiting for the fire department to arrive.

In any case, the fire alarm is not a toy. It is a tool that exists to be used in emergencies only. It is designed to help protect us from harm. The annoying features of alarms are designed to save lives and protect our property. So don't joke around and pull the alarm simply because you can.

When they're overused, fire alarms can be more than just disruptive and can be intimately dangerous. How many of you have woken up at 2 a.m. to the screeching noise of a fire alarm, the inanimate voice of the system telling you to get up and exit the building? You stumble out of bed into a dark hallway with flashing alarm lights and try to get your feet beneath you as you navigate through the confused crowd to the exterior of the building. There is no way to deny this waste of time, when it turns out there was no fire to begin with.

Whether you're resting, studying or partying, false fire alarms get in the way of everyday routines. Their misuse affects all students, even the culprits who pranked the rest of us, because in the end they too have to go wait outside until Kingdom Come.

If an alarm rings in class and instructors have to leave class lecture or discussion where it is — abruptly — even if the professor is lucky and his class is allowed back into the room in a few minutes, his or her class will be completely distracted and the difficulty inherent in teaching students who are busy using their laptops and phones in class only increases.

Do us all a favor and think twice before you pull that fire alarm. Luckily, laws exist that prevent a "Boy Who Cried Wolf" problem. Otherwise pranksters could get us in serious trouble one of these times.

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Send your letters to letters@iowastatedaily.com. Letters must include the name(s), phone number(s), majors and/or group affiliation(s) and year in school of the author(s). Phone numbers and addresses will not be published.

Online feedback may be used if first name and last name, major and year in school are included in the post. Feedback posted online is eligible for print in the Iowa State Daily.

Technology

~28 BITS OF ENTROPY
 UNCOMMON (NON-GIBBERISH) BASE WORD
 ORDER UNKNOWN
 Tr0ub4dor &3
 CAPS? COMMON SUBSTITUTIONS NUMERAL PUNCTUATION
 (YOU CAN ADD A FEW MORE BITS TO ACCOUNT FOR THE FACT THAT THIS IS ONLY ONE OF A FEW COMMON FORMATS.)
 2²⁸ = 3 DAYS AT 1000 GUESSES/SEC
 (PLAUSIBLE ATTACK ON A WEAK REMOTE WEB SERVICE. YES, CRACKING A STOLEN HASH IS FASTER, BUT IT'S NOT WHAT THE AVERAGE USER SHOULD WORRY ABOUT.)
 DIFFICULTY TO GUESS: EASY
 DIFFICULTY TO REMEMBER: HARD

~44 BITS OF ENTROPY
 correct horse battery staple
 FOUR RANDOM COMMON WORDS
 2⁴⁴ = 550 YEARS AT 1000 GUESSES/SEC
 DIFFICULTY TO GUESS: HARD
 DIFFICULTY TO REMEMBER: YOU'VE ALREADY MEMORIZED IT

THROUGH 20 YEARS OF EFFORT, WE'VE SUCCESSFULLY TRAINED EVERYONE TO USE PASSWORDS THAT ARE HARD FOR HUMANS TO REMEMBER, BUT EASY FOR COMPUTERS TO GUESS.

Comic courtesy of xkcd.com

Internet not as safe as you think

As you begin your semester at Iowa State, whether you are a new or an old student, one thing you probably don't pay enough attention to is Internet security.

I know that most people don't understand computer security very well, and whenever you see a story about computer security in the news, you don't look at much besides the cute picture of a masked hacker reaching out of the monitor to grab your wallet.

However, your security online is a real threat to worry about. When you spend tens of hours a week using Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and other services like Foursquare or Reddit, the security of your personal information on those websites should be of paramount importance. This is especially true when using your laptop, smartphone or tablet on an unsecured network, like the campus Wi-Fi network.

Iowa State's IT department should strive harder to educate students both about how to secure their computer from thieves and criminals and about how to stay safe on social networks.

I helped out with a push a few years ago to educate students about the security and legal issues surrounding file-sharing networks, so why can't ITS now strive to educate students about securing their computers and keeping their personal information private? Is that not just as important?

So while you might not have had reason to hunt down the "CyberSafe" page on the IT website before (which is quite good, I



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might add), here are five easy ways to keep your computer secure:

Update, update, update. Don't postpone requested updates and if you can, update proactively.

Make sure automatic updates are turned on and note programs that you need to manually update from time to time.

Use an anti-virus monitoring program.

Iowa State provides free options for students. I like some free programs like Avast! Make sure the anti-virus is installed, turned on and is set to scan the hard drive on a periodic schedule.

Scan occasionally for malware programs.

Find a malware scanner and use it every few weeks to check for malware left by websites and software on your machine after getting the latest updates for the scanner.

Put yourself behind a firewall for protection.

A good firewall can be your first line of defense in blocking hackers from getting in and preventing malicious programs from phoning back home. Use the built-in Windows firewall or try a free program like Comodo Firewall or ZoneAlarm.

Don't open suspicious web

pages, emails or files.

If it looks fishy, don't open it. If you already opened it, close it right away and run a virus scan. Easy!

Once you go online to sites like Facebook and Twitter, you put your trust in those companies and the security of their servers, but you can also help keep yourself safe from attackers by creating good passwords. You've probably heard that you should use lowercase letters, uppercase letters, numbers and symbols in your passwords. That's all good, but did you also know that the length of a password is more important than the complexity? Passwords get exponentially more difficult to break the longer they are, so strive for 10 or more characters to be safe.

You also don't want to have passwords that are words from the dictionary, passwords that are super-easy for you to remember or passwords that don't change from site to site. Some of the most popular passwords (that you don't want to use) include 123456, password, abc123, 123abc, monkey, and the name of the website you're visiting. Make your password challenging. Try using a password created by combining the first letters of each word in an easy-to-remember phrase.

Another thing to remember when checking Facebook on campus is that unless the website you're viewing is encrypting your communications to the site (you'll notice a padlock in the browser or an address beginning with https), anyone around you with the right tools can read your password as you send it over the unsecured Wi-Fi network. That is why you

should always use the slower, secure version of websites or use a password-protected Wi-Fi access point. An easy fix when you're on campus is to use the Firefox HTTPS-Everywhere plugin, which forces you to use encrypted versions of websites when they exist.

Even if your Wi-Fi network has WPA encryption (don't ever use WEP), with enough tools and time, an attacker can still get in. As computers get faster and hacking tools proliferate, it will only get easier for hackers to look at the data on your wireless network. One technically useful, but scary tool coming out soon that just appeared at a hacker conference claims to help an attacker infiltrate networks at the push of a button with only the use of an Android application. It's a brave new world out there.

Lastly, I just wanted to remind you to beware of location-sharing services like Foursquare, Gowalla, Google Latitude or Facebook Places. You should be careful who can see your updates and make sure you trust them. If a malicious person could get your updates, they could potentially determine your routine, the location of your house and more just by following the GPS breadcrumbs you leave behind.

Be careful out there. The digital world is a great place as long as you remember to put on the right digital armor before heading out to share, create and play online.

Rick Hanton is a senior in computer engineering from Arden Hills, Minn.

Justice

Strauss-Kahn's release is reasonable

Roughly three months ago, there was quite a media kerfuffle over allegations of sexual assault by the head of the International Monetary Fund, Dominique Strauss-Kahn. The story was that Strauss-Kahn assaulted a hotel housekeeper, Nafissatou Diallo. This past Tuesday, the charges against Strauss-Kahn were dropped — at the request of the prosecution, no less, who believed that the testimony they had received from Diallo was no longer credible.

It appears that Diallo had told several very different accounts of the incident at varying times, in addition to previously providing false information about a sexual assault on her application for asylum from Guinea.

With inconclusive physical evidence, the authorities were only left with Strauss-Kahn's word versus Diallo's. With Diallo's testimony under scrutiny, and ultimately found to be unreliable, it is unlikely a jury would be able



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to convict Strauss-Kahn beyond a reasonable doubt.

Strauss-Kahn could very well be guilty of the crimes with which he was charged. He may have simply managed to evade justice because his victim failed to maintain the same story for unknown reasons. As it is, the varying accounts given by Diallo has cast significant doubt on her story. And Dominique Strauss-Kahn remains innocent until proven guilty.

It seems the public and the media too often forget this small fact: Simply because someone is charged with a crime does not render them automatically guilty. In

fact, the French were somewhat shocked and outraged when the American press released pictures of Strauss-Kahn in handcuffs, being led away.

In France, it is illegal to depict those accused of crimes in things such as handcuffs — it is believed that such images will do away with the "presumption of innocence" that the accused holds.

Unfortunately, those who are arrested or charged with various crimes are frequently found guilty in the eyes of the public before a trial has even begun.

While rape and sexual assault cases must certainly be taken seriously and investigated thoroughly, sometimes it is true that the accuser is not in fact a victim. We may never know if Strauss-Kahn was truly innocent of the charges brought against him, but as it stands, Strauss-Kahn is still presumed as such.

It is the nature of our justice system that the guilty may sometimes go free. A flaw for certain,

but at this point, necessary. The amount of evidence required to convict the accused and the proof needed is set intentionally high to avoid unjust convictions. It is viewed as better to run the risk of the guilty going free than to falsely imprison an innocent.

Some may view the Strauss-Kahn case as an example of a powerful man getting away with taking advantage of an immigrant woman. Until this has been proven, perhaps in the civil lawsuit that Diallo is bringing against Strauss-Kahn, I prefer to think of it as an example of a man being let go because there was no reliable evidence to pursue the criminal charges.

We can only deal in the facts in cases such as this. Because the current facts don't support the allegations of Ms. Diallo, it is a perfectly reasonable and acceptable action to set Dominique Strauss-Kahn free.

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