

Free Windows Security Toolbox

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Microsoft's recent focus on security and the release of Windows XP Service Pack 2 (SP2) doesn't mean we can stop worrying about viruses, worms, and spam, but the utility software in our **Free Windows Security Toolbox** can help us worry less. In fact, these utilities are so powerful, you may no longer need the McAfee, Norton, or TrendMicro security suites. Since you're reading this, it's safe to assume you have Internet access. But this wonderful, seemingly unlimited resource is also the source of most of the aforementioned problems. Malicious people use the Internet to try to gain access to your PC or network to obtain private information, steal bandwidth, send unsolicited email to others, promote unwanted products and services, or cause your computer to fail. Different types of software can help you prevent this unauthorized access and protect your privacy including: firewall, antivirus, anti-spyware, anti-spam, anti-popup / browser, system monitors, system cleaners and file security. Descriptions of each type, along with specific recommendations for currently available free software, can help you understand, prepare for, prevent, and recover from most problems.

Firewall

FreeSoftwareReviews.org recommends [ZoneAlarm](#)

Firewalls block authorized access to your PC from the Internet and can also block access to the Internet from unauthorized software on your PC. Most broadband "modems" (e.g. cable, DSL) now include firewall functions. But these hardware solutions can only block access from the inbound wired connection - they cannot stop unauthorized wireless access or access from other computers on your network or prevent unauthorized programs from accessing the Internet *from* your computer. Each Internet computer should have its own software firewall installed. Although the software firewall included in Windows XP SP2 is much improved, Microsoft's less than stellar record for releasing secure software causes many to question its effectiveness. ZoneLab's popular ZoneAlarm provides powerful firewall protection.

Antivirus

FreeSoftwareReviews.org recommends [Avast Home Edition](#)

Most email users know better than to open an attachment from unfamiliar sources. Many are aware of the recent arrests of people who created damaging viruses that infected millions of computer. Almost everyone knows that antivirus utilities scan a computer's memory and drives and email for ill-intentioned software. But surprisingly few people know that powerful, free software like Avast Antivirus Home Edition does this AND protects against viruses, trojans and worms received through file-sharing programs like BearShare, Kazaa and Morpheus, and instant messengers from AOL, ICQ, MSN and Yahoo. All without the annual renewal fee. Sadly, the popular AVG Antivirus from Grisoft is no longer free.

Anti-spyware

FreeSoftwareReviews.org recommends [Ad-aware](#), [Hijack This](#), and [Spybot Search & Destroy](#) and [X-Cleaner Free](#)

A significant increase in spyware - hidden software that monitors your activity, promotes unwanted products and services, and / or prevents other programs from working correctly - has also increased awareness and popularity of anti-spyware utilities, along with blurring the lines between spyware and virus. Thankfully, some of the best (and best-known) anti-spyware utilities are free. Some utilities (e.g. Ad-aware and Spybot) scan and remove spyware from your computer's memory and hard-drives like antivirus utilities. Others, like Hijack This, identify spyware that is currently running on your system. Still others (e.g. X-Cleaner) provide additional tools to prevent damage from Spyware, like open TCP/IP port identification and an onscreen keyboard to prevent keyboard logging (special thanks to [GeekyGuy](#) for recommending X-Cleaner). Unlike anti-virus and software firewalls, having more than one anti-spyware program usually doesn't cause conflicts and increases the likelihood of correctly identifying and removing spyware.

Anti-spam

FreeSoftwareReviews.org recommends [Cactus Spam Filter](#)

Most Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and other email providers offer server-based tools for identifying and / or blocking unsolicited email (spam) before it gets downloaded. In addition to providing another layer of defense, spam utilities running your PC often have the feature of learning what YOU consider spam, rather than what someone else considers spam.

Anti-Popup / Browser

FreeSoftwareReviews.org recommends [Mozilla](#)

Efficiency and productivity is the promise of the Internet. Popups break that promise. Rather than look for Internet Explorer addons to block popups, why not replace that old, tired browser with a frequently-updated new browser that has built-in features for stopping popups, opening new tabs instead of new windows, and much more (even if it HAS been around longer than Internet Explorer - pun intended). Mozilla's Firefox offers similar features, but hasn't stood the test of time (or the test of Beta...).

System monitors

FreeSoftwareReviews.org recommends [WinPatrol](#)

Most spyware, viruses, trojans and worms thrive by changing your system configuration (registry) so the program is started automatically. Some even disable antivirus software or software firewalls first. Some websites attempt to hijack the home page defined in your browser. System monitors notify and / or prevent changes to your configuration and can provide detailed information (or healthy suspicion) about the applications and services currently running on your computer. Although Windows XP SP2 has greatly improved the built-in system monitor functionality, other system monitors like WinPatrol provide much more protection and information and work with multiple versions of Windows.

System cleaners

FreeSoftwareReviews.org recommends [CCleaner](#)

Many programs provide uninstall utilities that leave settings in the Windows configuration file called the Registry and save a list of recently used file so they can be reopened quickly. Browsers store graphics files from the Internet in hidden directories to improve performance. Did you know that information about every website you visit using Internet Explorer is stored in a hidden file called index.dat?

File Security

FreeSoftwareReviews.org recommends [SuperShredder and Cryptainer LE](#)

Even with all of these great, free security programs, you may have some information so valuable that you don't want to risk it being seen by anyone. A file encryption utility like Cryptainer can password-protect your critical files - but be careful not to forget your password. To make sure a deleted file is not recovered (e.g. when you donate a computer or throwaway a hard drive), use a secure file deletion program like SuperShredder.

If you use and like these powerful free utilities, please rate them here at FreeSoftwareReviews.org and consider donating to the authors who created those tools. If you know of other great free software not listed here, but submit it so we can included in our Free Software Reviews.

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