

Industry Leaders, Agencies Join Forces To Help Fight Cybercrime; Awareness Campaigns Address Consumers' Growing Concern About Online Safety Ⓜ

(NAPSA)—Do you usually leave your house without bothering to lock the front door? Probably not.

Connecting your computer to the Internet without taking appropriate security precautions can be just as risky as leaving your front door unlocked. Hackers and other cyber criminals may try to control your computer, steal private information, crash your system or even hijack bank accounts.

To help raise awareness of cyber security, the National Cyber Security Alliance (NCSA) is promoting the month of October as National Cyber Security Awareness Month. This year's theme—Cyber Security. Make It a Habit—is the organization's third annual nationwide campaign to educate Internet users of all ages about practices that can increase their online safety and security. NCSA will work with industry partners to spread the word about online safety by providing tips and tools and hosting special events.

Other industry leaders are also doing their part to make consumers aware of the resources available to help protect their PCs, their information and their families online. For example, during National Cyber Security Awareness Month and throughout the year, Microsoft Corp. sponsors awareness activities to educate people to take simple steps to help ensure their safety, including participating in the Get Net Safe tour

to raise consumer awareness of online security and assisting the United Nations with a toolkit that governments worldwide can use to help educate citizens about child safety online.

"Online threats are manageable and often avoidable if we learn how to spot the dangers and steer clear of them," said Kristin Johnsen, senior director of security outreach at Microsoft. "We are committed to helping people understand the threats and how to avoid them to have a more positive experience while exploring the Internet."

As part of this, both Microsoft and NCSA encourage users to do four things to help protect their PCs:

- Use an Internet firewall. A firewall functions like a moat around a castle: It helps keep your sensitive information in your computer safe from the outside world.

- Keep your Microsoft Windows-based computer more protected and up to date against potential threats; do this automatically by using the Automatic Updates feature.

- Use an anti-virus product and keep it current to help ensure you aren't vulnerable to the bad guys. To see if your software is up to date, open your anti-virus program from the Start menu or the taskbar notification area and look for its update status. If you still aren't sure if your anti-virus software is up to date, contact your

anti-virus software provider.

- Use anti-spyware software to help keep unknown people from lurking on your computer and potentially stealing your information.

Online experts including the NCSA, Microsoft and other industry leaders offer additional tips for helping to protect your information, such as keeping personal information private; creating passwords that contain a mixture of at least eight numbers, letters and symbols; and guarding those passwords and your account numbers with special care.

As an added investment in helping keep consumers safe online, Microsoft works with several organizations with expertise in law enforcement, education and child development to provide basic guidelines that can help families establish safe Internet behaviors, including setting clear rules for Internet usage, using content-filtering technology, and keeping communication open between parents and their children.

While some amount of online criminal activity will probably always exist, by taking some simple precautions and educating yourself about the risks and available resources, you can enjoy a safer online experience. Additional tips can be found on <http://www.staysafeonline.org>, which provides free guidance on how to manage online safety and security issues.