
KEYSTROKES YIELD ID CLUES

ISU prof, defense department hope research into unique typing patterns leads to advances in computer security

Recall overcrowd puts products in danger

Experts warn of 2,363 products

By CHRISTOPHER DODEN
Gannett Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — U.S. regulators, retailers and manufacturers are growing increasingly concerned that a surge in the number of products being recalled is resulting in “fatigue” by the public — increasing the chance that consumers will ignore or miss a recall, which could ultimately endanger their health.

Consumers last year were deluged with 2,363 recalls, about 6.5 recalls each day. All differing consumer products — pharmaceuticals, medical devices and food, according to data from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the Consumer Product Safety Commission and the Consumer Federation of America.
The way you type on your computer’s keyboard is as unique as your handwriting, and may even be a matter of national security, says an Iowa State University engineering professor.

The U.S. Department of Defense, looking for better ways than hacker-prone passwords to protect its systems, is betting a $500,000 research grant that ISU professor Morris Chang is right.

Chang, an associate professor of electrical and computer engineering, said we all take unique pauses between keystrokes, especially when typing complicated words.

“When you spell a particular word, you may have a tendency to pause at a certain character,” Chang said. “Your pause would be different than mine.”

The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, part of the Defense Department, wants a security system that doesn’t rely on passwords and is capable of continuously ensuring that the authorized user is the only one on any particular computer.

A system that can tell who is

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The number of pills that could have been out of sequence, increasing the chance of an unintended pregnancy. IKEA asked its customers to return about 90,000 high chairs because the restraint buckle had been replaced unnecessarily. And he warned the public not to eat a lettuce salad mix from a possible health risk from salmonella.

Retailers and government regulators are investigating the food supply system that could be affecting the health of the American consumer. The USDA conducted an investigation into the use of antibiotics in food animal production. The agency found that antibiotics are being used in food animal production without a prescription.

The U.S. Agriculture Department's Food Safety and Inspection Service improved its recall system in March by rolling out a Twitter feed that alerts retailers and consumers of potential recalls. The system is designed to help retailers and consumers quickly identify and respond to recalls.

The system uses the term “biometrics” to describe the use of unique identifiers such as name, date of birth, and Social Security number to authenticate users. The system also uses the term “active authentication” to describe the use of dynamic identifiers such as a one-time code or a biometric identifier.

The system is being tested at ISU, where 3,000 students and staff members will log onto a website, using a password and a biometric identifier. They will then be asked to type in a series of numbers, respond to an email, and surf the Web to complete the process.

Their keystrokes will be monitored in the background, and patterns will be analyzed. The system will be refined for future use.

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There likely will be ripple effects from the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling this month on the Affordable Care Act. The law affects most major components of the U.S. health care system in its effort to extend coverage to millions of uninsured people. JACQUELYN MARTIN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT
WHAT'S AT STAKE

The U.S. Supreme Court is expected to deliver a decision on the federal law requiring all Americans to be insured, a key piece of legislation for the Obama administration. The main issue is whether or not the government has the authority to require all citizens to have health insurance and fine them if they do not comply.

The coverage guarantee would balloon costs unless virtually all people joined the insurance pool. Opponents say Congress overstepped its constitutional authority by issuing the insurance mandate. The administration says the requirement is permissible because it serves to regulate interstate commerce. Most people already are insured. The law provides subsidies to help uninsured middle-class households pay premiums and expands Medicaid to pick up more low-income people.

Families

The coverage for young adults up to age 26 on a parent's health insurance is a popular provision that no one's arguing about. A report last week from the Commonwealth Fund, a for-profit foundation focused on health systems, estimated that 6.6 million young adults have taken advantage of the benefit, while a new Gallup survey showed the uninsured rate for people ages 18 to 25 continues to decline, down to 23 percent from 28 percent when the law took effect.

Families will be watching to see if their 20-something transitions to the work world will get to keep that newfound security.

Because the benefit is a winner with consumers, experts say many employers and insurers would look for ways to keep offering it even if there's no legal requirement to do so.

Many parents would pay higher taxes as a result because they would have to pay for the young adult's coverage with after-tax dollars, said economist Paul Fronstin of the Employee Benefit Research Institute. Under the health care law, that coverage now comes out of pre-tax dollars.

Fronstin says there's no way to tell exactly how much that tax increase might be, but a couple of hundred dollars a year or more is a reasonable estimate. Upper-income taxpayers would have a greater liability.

"Adult children aren't necessarily dependent for tax purposes, but an employer can allow anyone to be on a plan, just like they now allow domestic partners," said Fronstin.

"If your employer said, 'I'm going to let you keep this,' it would become a taxable benefit for certain people." Senior citizens

Advocates for the elderly also are worried about ripple effects.

If the entire law is overturned, seniors with high prescription costs in Medicare's "doughnut hole" coverage gap could lose annual discounts averaging about $600. AARP Policy Director David Certner says he would hope the discounts could remain in place at least through the end of this year.

Yet that might not be possible. Lacking legal authority, Medicare would have to take away the discounts. Drugmakers, now bearing the cost, could decide they want to keep offering discounts voluntarily. But then they'd risk running afoul of other federal rules that bar medical providers from offering financial inducements to Medicare recipients.

"I don't think anyone has any idea," said Certner.

Chiesa hopes to get research money for two more phases over the next three years. The second would involve developing software to detect intruders based on typing patterns. The third would look for holes in the system.

"Everyone knows we have problems with passwords," said Richard Guidorizzi, the defense agency's program manager. People forget passwords, or make them too easily guessed by hackers, for example.

"I want to move to a world where you sit down on the console and you identify yourself and you begin working and the authentication happens in the background invisible to you while you continue to do your work without interruption," he said.

Guidorizzi said at the time that the Defense Department does not intend to use the results of the research to spy. Nor will the keyboarding data gathered to identify authorized users be stored.

"We don't want to store this information," he said. "Otherwise, hackers would get to that and the system would be worthless."

But some privacy advocates worry such safeguards could have negative consequences if misused.

Rebecca Jeschke of the nonprofit Electronic Frontier Foundation in San Francisco said such technologies could raise privacy questions, even if they also help match consumers with products they might want, for example.

"The freedoms and protections in the physical world need to come with us into the digital world," said Jeschke, a digital rights analyst. "The future I don't want is one in which you can't use a new tool because you don't know what information they will share."

She added: "To me, what's concerning right now is that people don't know when they are being tracked."