Intruders Breach Network Security; Passwords Stolen

By Daniel C. Stevenson

Intruders compromised a computer on the MIT network and used it to capture more than 600 user names and passwords during a two-day period last November, according to Thomas J. Coppeto, system programmer for Distributed Computing and Network Services, a division of Information Systems. It was notified of the attack late last week.

The attackers used a custom program to illegally find the user names and hidden passwords of anyone accessing a remote computer from any computer on a part of MITnet covering Buildings 1, 3, 5, 7, and 11. While users' Athena accounts may not have been compromised, usernames and passwords for any accounts they had on remote computers that they accessed using the telnet, ftp, or rlogin programs may have been exposed, Coppeto said.

Additionally, if users of computers on the affected network logged on to any of the Athena dialup servers while entering their passwords, their Athena accounts may have been compromised, he said.

5,000 accesses logged in two days

The attack was discovered in a log on a computer used by the Free Software Foundation in the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory. Coppeto said, "The attackers, for some reason, copied the log to the FSF machine" from the machine used to "stiff" the information in Building 1, he said.

Upon discovering the situation, someone in the FSF notified the Carnegie Mellon University-based Computer Emergency Response Team and gave them the log file. Coppeto said. CERT then notified IS of the situation, and the FSF machine was disconnected from the network, he said.

"We have no idea who these people are but there are probably many of them," Coppeto said. "This is an Internet-wide problem, and we are currently not aware of what the CERT knows, if anything at all, about these crackers."

The log file showed two days' worth of data covering over 5,000 accesses to 13,000 different remote computers.

Recent 'Suspicious' West Campus Fires Under Investigation

By A. Arif Huxlin

Four suspicious fires in West Campus dormitories, the Student Center, and the Chapel have been reported to the Campus Police since mid-December. According to Chief Anne P. Glavin. The incidents follow in the wake of a series of fires at Burnt-Coaster House in October and an early-December fire at MacGregor.

On Dec. 14 the stairwell suite door in MacGregor House suite 321 was discovered on fire. Graduate Resident Tait Russell Tesser G said. The door had been decorated with wrapping paper and a bow for the holiday season. The Campus Police also found that smoke detectors on the second and third floors of the entry had been disabled, he said.

"I don't know what the motivation for the fire was. (The room) may have just been a convenient target," Tesser said.

This fire occurred just over a week after a burning toilet-paper roll in an adjacent suite caused a building-wide evacuation. "Fire in MacGregor Causes Evacuation," Dec. 6). Investigators do not know who is responsible and have not made a connection between the two incidents, said Morgan House master Stephen J. Lippard.

In November many residents at J-Entry feel insecure as much as the apparent increase in convicted sex assault to residents — i.e., by acquaintance or in the main, chief," said Daniel A. Freedman '91, a resident at J-Entry.

"Campus Police has done pretty much all that they could," said Karen D. Green '95, another suite resident, who feels she must view the fire with increased awareness.

Christmas tree also burn

The following day, the Holiday Tree that stood in front of the Student Center was found alight by a Campus Police officer. The officer noticed flames near the bottom of the tree at 2:40 a.m.

While on patrol and quickly unplugged the lights that had been strung around the tree, the Cambridge Fire Department was called to extinguish the fire, Glavin said. She said that the incident did not seem to be accidental due to other findings, but refused to comment further.

A minor incident was reported on Dec. 21 when paper ashes were tossed into a trash bin fire. The incident did not cause any serious damage, the Bridge Fire Department, Glavin said.

That area is generally desolate at night, which made it a convenient target for someone who feels he must look out for himself, Winsor said. Some cases require more aggressive followup, she added.

"The fact that we've had so many fires is cause for concern and is the reason why we're investigating," Glavin said. "There are very serious situations and we're viewing them with a high degree of seriousness."

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