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Information Security: pop-up phishing warning

The Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3), a partnership between the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the National White Collar Crime Center, has issued a warning about a new twist to the old telephone-based tech support phishing scam: fake “pop-up” attack warnings designed to hijack your computer.

In this scam, a pop-up window appears in the user’s Web browser warning of a computer virus and urging them to call a toll-free number for assistance. In some instances, users cannot close the pop-up window and attempts to bypass the warning only produce further warnings. Some of these phishing programs include audio voice-over which plays on an unending loop, and many of these websites are poorly secured and visiting them can infect your computer with a variety of malicious programs.

IC3 investigators called the help number and were connected to a person claiming to be a computer manufacturer’s service representative. The fake service rep tried to convince the investigators that something was wrong with their computer, such as a hardware fail-



ure, a computer virus infection or software needed to be updated. If you make the mistake of sharing your computer’s system information or installing the scam’s software, the cybercriminal can take remote control of your computer, gaining access to confidential information and possibly infecting the computer with actual viruses to compromise the system.

This recent wave of attacks is particularly active and likely to be more effective than the classic fake tech support phone call. While technically unsophisticated, these pages can be so troublesome that some desperate users actually call for help. Some of these can prevent closing the browser window and also disable right-click control on your computer mouse. When authorities identify and shut

down one of these phishing sites, another is created, all with legitimate-sounding names.

TDCJ’s software security, managed by the Information Technology Department, blocks most phishing attempts from agency computers, but if you see a pop-up warning urging you to call for technical assistance, remain calm and call the agency’s computer help desk at 936-437-1304. Despite the urgent tone of the message, never call a toll-free number or click on a Web link for tech support assistance with a TDCJ computer.

If you encounter a phishing pop-up while using your home computer, don’t use a Close button appearing within the pop-up window as it could actually link to a malicious website. Try to close the pop-up by clicking on the X in the upper-right corner or striking the Alt+F4 keys on your keyboard. If the pop-up does not close, click on the Windows Start Menu, type Task Manager and hit enter. Try to terminate Internet Explorer by opening the Processes tab, right-clicking on iexplore.exe and selecting End Process. An antivirus scan should be run after the pop-up has been eliminated to help ensure that the system was not infected. ●