NATIONAL Campus News

The Behrend Beacon

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Wireless gadgets may not be as secure as you think

by Heather Newman Knight Ridder Newspapers

The Defense Department has just ordered its employees not to communicate anything sensitive over any kind of wireless device. including phones, pagers and computers. Should you?

· That depends. Most of us don't communicate anything more private than our opinions and schedules using wireless devices, and though that information could be embarrass-· ing, it's rarely a matter of national security. Still, nobody wants to think that people are eavesdropping on their conversations. So here, for those who want to live a life without wires, is a measure of your insecurities:

Phones: Although wired phones can be tapped into by a determined tech-savvy phone phreak or law enforcement agencies with a warrant, it's unlikely that yours will be. Wired phones, which are becoming relics in some households, are a dandy way to communicate sensitive information such as credit card numbers.

Cordless phones vary. Conversations on old-style analog phones and even some newer digital models can be picked up by anyone with the right radio or police scanner. Newer high-end spectrum-hopping units are harder to intercept but suffer from static from other electronic devices.

Cellular phones are harder to crack into than home-based cordless models, but they're hardly immune. Analog phones, or digital phones in analog mode or roaming in an analog area, are easier for folks to listen in on than digital transmissions but even restricting calls to digital areas isn't entirely secure.

Radios: Two-way radios (including oldfashioned models and those using today's Family Radio Service and General Mobile Radio Service frequencies) are not secure, even with the voice-scrambling features some have built in. It's relatively easy to equip a scanner with unscrambling devices, which make conversations crystal clear.

Baby monitors and wireless home intercoms typically use the same frequencies as cordless phones and are subject to the same risks

Pagers: Most pagers are susceptible to some kind of interception, even if it's just hackers breaking into the computerized systems that collect and send messages.

Some two-way pagers include security software at either end so that transmissions are encoded while in the air. That doesn't solve the problem of people hacking the company itself, but it does dramatically reduce the risk of casual message interception.

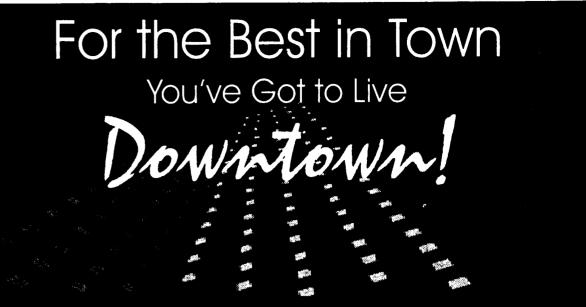
Ask your provider what security measures are built into your paging system, if any.

Computers: Wireless home networks are a growing target for so-called war drivers, kids with time on their hands who drive around hoping to intercept a computer's communications with the Internet - and maybe to take control of your machine.

Simple security includes using the wireless base station's built-in features, like limiting the network card (MAC) addresses from which it will accept transmissions to the computers in your house, or encoding information while it's in the air. See your owner's manual for details

Transmissions from handheld computers with wireless capabilities are subject to the same risks as regular computers when using wireless networks in your house or as cell phones or pagers when they're transmitting wirelessly on the road.

The bottom line? If you really want to keep something private, tell it to someone in person, send it in the postal mail or call on a wired phone. Even then, you won't be completely certain that you're not being overheard. But you'll know it'll be a lot harder for someone to listen in.



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Invite to Cheney prompts protest at University of Pennsylvania

by James M. O'Neill Knight Ridder Newspapers

What philanthropist and chemical company magnate Jon M. Huntsman intended as a private party to christen the Wharton building that bears his name has become a lightning rod for student activists opposed to a possible war with Iraq, because of a party guest list headlined by Vice President Dick Cheney. A cadre of student activists at the University of Pennsylvania are hoping a few cardboard-cutout skulls and three wellplaced tents can prod their peers to protest when Cheney visits campus Friday. The activists set up the small tent city on the university's College Green Wednesday, along with signs declaring "War = Terrorism" and "Iraqi children are beautiful." Huntsman, a Wharton graduate who has given \$50 million to Penn and \$250 million to start a cancer institute at the University of Utah, founded a Utah-based container and chemical company that has annual sales of \$8 billion. He invited Cheney, a personal friend, to a private celebration of the new, \$140-million Huntsman Hall, Wharton's imposing stone and brick building that houses 48 classrooms and 57 group study rooms.

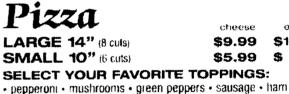
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The Penn activists are also miffed that Cheney was invited to the business school.

"Wharton is making great progress promoting socially responsible business practices in its curriculum, and I'm appalled that they would open this great building by inviting Cheney," said Penn student Melissa Byrne.

The students handed out flyers that summarize Cheney's links to Enron and that argue that tax cuts initiated by the Bush administration benefitted corporate executives even as corporate scandals at Enron and other companies helped fuel an economic downturn that led to job cuts and the loss of 401(k) retirement savings for many Americans. "The Bush-Cheney administration has violated economic human rights considerably," one flyer concludes.

This new generation of student activists is clean-cut, polite and well-spoken. "This protest is to build a movement as much as it is for Cheney to see," said organizer Lincoln Ellis, who briefly left the mini-encampment to attend class.

Some students are veterans of the anti-sweatshop movement that swept campuses in early 2000, but they are also starting to attract the previously noninvolved.

"This campus is generally apathetic," said senior Dan Fishback, who was finally driven to activism after hearing New York University media professor Mark Crispin Miller's critical look at media coverage of the Sept. 11 anniversary during a recent Penn lecture. "We're not trying to win people over. The tent city is here to energize an anti-war opinion that's already there.'

Senior Jesse Tendler said he used to limit his involvement to community service. "I've come to realize that while service is important, activism gets things done," he said. "So many students are against the war, but they don't know what to do about it. We've been conditioned to be apathetic."

The Penn students have been reaching out to like-minded peers on other area campuses, and hope to lure a large crowd to campus Friday for Cheney's visit.

Wharton has also scheduled public events through the weekend to note the building's opening.



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