



## Computer Safety

*American Bar Association  
Commission on Domestic Violence*

### **Warning:**

Taking all of the actions on this page may not prevent an abuser from discovering your email and Internet activity. The safest way to find information on the Internet is to go to a safer computer. Suggestions are: a local library, a friend's house or your workplace. Other safety suggestions: change your password often, do not pick obvious words or numbers for your password, and pick a combination of letters and numbers for your password.

### **Tips to increase safety**

Browsers like Netscape, Internet Explorer, and AOL are designed to leave traces behind indicating where you've been on the Internet. If an abuser knows how to read your computer's history or cache file (automatically saved web pages and graphics), he or she may be able to see information you have viewed recently on the Internet. When using web-browsers, these steps can help to reduce the lists of websites users have visited:

#### **For Netscape Navigator**

1. Click on the EDIT menu; choose PREFERENCES; choose ADVANCED; then choose CACHE. Click on both "Clear Memory Cache" and "Clear Disk Cache". Then hit OK.
2. Click on the EDIT menu; choose PREFERENCES; then choose NAVIGATOR. A "Clear History" button will appear, then choose OK.
3. Click on the EDIT menu; choose PREFERENCES; then choose NAVIGATOR, click on the "Clear Location Bar" button on the bottom of the window, then choose OK.

#### **For Internet Explorer**

1. Click on the TOOLS menu; choose INTERNET OPTIONS; then choose the GENERAL tab at the top. In the section called "Temporary Internet Files", click on "Deleted Files" to clear your cache. On the same screen, in the section called "history", press the CLEAR HISTORY button to erase your history list.
2. When using Internet Explorer, there is a function which will complete a partial web address automatically, giving the abuser the entire address the victim has visited. This option can be found and changed on the MS Internet Explorer page by clicking on the "VIEW" icon at the top, then "INTERNET OPTIONS" and the "ADVANCED" tab. About halfway down there is a "USE AUTOCOMPLETE" box that can be checked and unchecked by clicking on it. Make sure it is NOT checked.

#### **For AOL**

1. Version 4.0: Pull down My AOL menu; select PREFERENCE. Click on WWW icon. Then select CLEAR HISTORY.
2. Version 6.0: Pull down SETTINGS menu; select INTERNET PROPERTIES. Then select CLEAR HISTORY.

Other browsers will be slightly different, but in any case, what you need to do is reduce your CACHE ("temporary files") and HISTORY list. Please remember that erasing these lists is not infallible; a computer expert may still be able to trace any websites that were visited. Still, these precautionary steps will help decrease the likelihood of discovering the users previously visited sites.



After clearing your cache, you may want to visit other sites that you think your partner would NOT object to; that way, the missing information is less likely to be noticed.

### ***HOW AN ABUSER CAN DISCOVER YOUR INTERNET ACTIVITIES***

**Email:** If an abuser has access to your email account, he or she may be able to read your incoming and outgoing mail. If you believe your account is secure, make sure you choose a password he or she will not be able to guess. If an abuser sends you threatening or harassing email messages, they may be printed and saved as evidence of this abuse. Additionally, the messages may constitute a federal offense. For more information on this issue, contact your local United States Attorney's Office.

**History/cache file:** If an abuser knows how to read your computer's history or cache file (automatically saved web pages and graphics), he or she may be able to see information you have viewed recently on the Internet.

You can clear your history or empty your cache file in your browser's settings.\*

- **Netscape:**  
Pull down Edit menu, select Preferences. Click on Navigator on choose "Clear History". Click on Advanced then select Cache. Click on "Clear Disk Cache". On older versions of Netscape: Pull down Options menu. Select Network Options, select Cache. Click on "Clear Disk Cache."
- **Internet Explorer:**  
Pull down Tools menu, select Internet Options. On General page, under Temporary Internet Files, click on "Delete Files." If asked, check the box to delete all offline content. Still within the Temporary Internet Files section, click on Settings. (This next step may make it harder to navigate pages where you'd like your information to be remembered, but these remaining cookies do show website pages you have visited. Therefore, use your own judgment as to whether or not to take this next step). Click on "View Files." Manually highlight all the files (cookies) shown, then hit delete. Close that window, then on General page under History section, click on "Clear History."
- **AOL:**  
Pull down Members menu, select Preferences. Click on WWW icon. Then select Advanced. Purge Cache.

Additionally, a victim needs to make sure that the "Use Inline Autocomplete" box is NOT checked. This function will complete a partial web address while typing a location in the address bar at the top of the browser. If you are using Internet Explorer, this box can be found on the MS Internet Explorer Page by clicking on "Tools" at the top of the screen, then "Internet Options," and then the "Advanced" tab. About halfway down there is a "Use Inline Autocomplete" box that can be checked and unchecked by clicking on it. Uncheck the box to disable the feature that automatically completes an Internet address when you start typing in the Internet address box.

\*This information may not completely hide your tracks. Many browser types have features that display recently visited sites. The safest way to find information on the Internet would be at a local library, a friend's house, or at work.