

Tip of the Month: WinPatrol can help keep your computer safe

By Jennifer Jahedkar

WinPatrol is a program that has been included in County Support CDs and is recommended by EIT to help you see what programs are running on your computer and alert you to programs that may have been added without your permission. It's available for download at <http://eit.tamu.edu/downloadlist.html>

When you run WinPatrol, you will see Scotty the Watch Dog in the Taskbar in the right lower corner of the screen. You can double click Scotty to see the what he's learned about your computer. Here are some of the things you'll see in the WinPatrol dialog box that opens:

Under the Startup Programs tab you'll see the programs that automatically start when you turn on your computer. This is important because nasty things like Trojans, worms, spyware, and adware tend to insert itself into the startup group. WinPatrol will notify you if a new Startup Program is added, so programs won't insert themselves without your knowledge. Many programs have been pre-installed by your computer manufacturer and aren't harmful. From the Startup Programs tab you'll see the name of each program and you can specify if it's ok or not. To help you decide, view properties of the program to identify what company created it. If you choose to Remove or Disable it the program it will stay on your hard drive but it won't automatically start anymore.

Under the IE Helpers tab you'll see Browser Helper Objects or BHOs, programs that are associated with Internet Explorer. When IE is started, various Helper Objects, like Google Toolbar, or Adobe's Acrobat Helper, will start with the browser. Many are good! But bad BHOs can be installed by programs you download and they can be used as Spyware, Ad-ware or worse. If you see suspicious BHOs in the IE Helpers tab, you can remove them by clicking the Remove button. It won't delete it from your hard drive but it will prevent that BHO from loading with your browser.

Under the Cookies tab you'll see all the cookies that have been downloaded so you can review their contents. Cookies are used by some websites to create a personalized interface for you. It's hard to completely turn off cookie support in your browser, as many pages depend on them. When you review the cookies with WinPatrol, you can see where a cookie came from and what data is being stored in it. Then you can choose to keep legitimate cookies and remove others.

Under the Options tab you can specify how WinPatrol runs on your computer. Scotty is asleep while you're working, and he will wake up at intervals you specify in options and will warn you of any changes at that time. The recommendation is that WinPatrol be started each time you reboot your computer. When this option is selected you'll see WinPatrol listed as one of your Startup Programs.

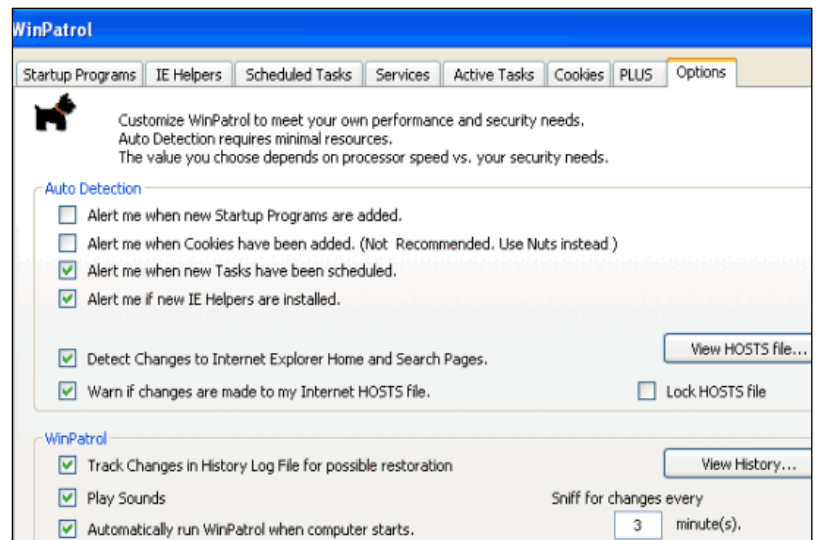


Figure 6: WinPatrol Options

Oh, and if you choose the option to play sounds, Scotty will bark if he needs to get your attention!

WinPatrol is one of a number of useful free programs included in County Support CDs, many of which are also linked from the <http://eit.tamu.edu/downloadlist.html>. You can learn more about WinPatrol and also download it directly from <http://www.winpatrol.com/winpatrol.html>

Paula Nusz, County Office Sherman suggested we write about WinPatrol. Thanks, Paula!