

The Australian

Call to banish virus-hit computers from internet

- **by: Natasha Bitá**
- From: **The Australian**
- January 25, 2010 12:00AM

COMPUTERS infected with viruses could be "expelled" from the internet under a new industry code to control Australia's plague of contaminated PCs.

The federal government has given the internet industry an operate-or-legislate ultimatum to identify "zombie" computers involved in cyber-crime.

The Internet Industry Association - whose members include major internet service providers Optus, Telstra, Vodafone, AAPT, Virgin and Hutchison 3G, as well as industry giants Facebook, Google and Microsoft - is preparing a voluntary industry code to come into force this year.

The move follows industry intelligence that Australia now hosts the world's third-highest number of "zombie" computers infected with malicious software that can attack other PCs, send spam, store child pornography or steal the user's identity.

A draft copy of the voluntary code says the ISPs should identify affected computers and try to contact the users, by phone or email.

It proposes ISPs apply an "abuse" plan to slow down the speed of the customer's infected computer, or to change the customer's password so they are forced to call the ISP help desk.

"(Another action could be to) provide the customer with a timeframe in which to take remedial access and, if this is not adhered to, terminate service."

The code states ISPs should cut off internet access only in the "most extreme of cases", when a customer had refused to install anti-virus software, or where the amount of spam being sent from the customer's account was clogging up the network.

A global report by security technology giant McAfee reveals that Australia now ranks behind only the US and China for the number of "zombie" computers that fell under the control of spammers in 2009. "The 'Land Down Under' is proving to be fertile ground for zombie recruiting," the report says.

It estimates Australia accounts for 6.3 per cent of the world's "new zombies", compared with 18 per cent from the US and 13.3 per cent from China. Just two years ago, Australia was not even in the top 10 countries listed in McAfee's Global Threats report.

The internet industry's voluntary code of conduct is being pushed by the federal Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy.

The department has told a parliamentary inquiry into cyber-crime that the voluntary code is faster than introducing legislation.

"We've always said that if this does not work then government will have to consider firmer options because this is really serious stuff," Keith Besgrove, the first assistant secretary of the digital economy services division, told a cyber-crime hearing in Canberra late last year.

"This is damn dangerous and we've got to do something about it."
