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OECD urges governments and industry to do more to tackle spam

Governments and industry should step up their coordination to combat the global problem of spam, according to a new set of OECD recommendations.

Spam is dangerous and costly for business and consumers. It disrupts networks, cuts productivity, spreads viruses and is increasingly used by criminals who steal passwords to access confidential information and often bank accounts. While there is no single solution, governments and the private sector should act fast on a number of fronts. The OECD calls on governments to establish clear national anti-spam policies and give enforcement authorities more power and resources. Co-ordination and co-operation between public and private sectors are critical, the report notes.

International cooperation is also key. Spam moves between countries and investigators have to follow the flow across borders to track spammers. To address this, OECD governments have approved a "Recommendation on Cross-Border Co-operation in the Enforcement of Laws against Spam", urging countries to ensure that their laws enable enforcement authorities to share information with other countries and do so more quickly and effectively. They should also establish a single national contact point to facilitate international cooperation.

Educating people on the risks of spam and how to deal with it is also important. Governments, working with industry, should run nationwide campaigns to raise awareness. Lessons on spam and Internet security should be included in computer courses in schools and for senior citizens.

These recommendations form part of the OECD Anti-Spam Toolkit, available online at www.oecd-antispam.org. It gives policy makers a comprehensive package of concrete regulatory approaches, technical solutions, and industry initiatives to fight spam.

The Toolkit also includes a guide to best practices for Internet Service Providers and other network operators, and for email marketing. These were produced by the Business and Industry Advisory Committee (BIAC), the business advisory group to the OECD, in co-operation with the Messaging Anti-Abuse Working Group (MAAWG), an organization of Internet Service Providers. This is the first effort by the private sector to develop a series of common best practices at the international level.

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