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Insurance giant coughs to malware-related data breach

This is not business as usual

By **John Leyden**

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The US arm of insurance giant Aviva has blamed a computer virus infection for the potential disclosure of sensitive personal information.

Aviva (Norwich Union, before a recent rebranding) admitted the breach in a [letter](http://doj.nh.gov/consumer/pdf/aviva_USA.pdf) (http://doj.nh.gov/consumer/pdf/aviva_USA.pdf) to the Attorney General of New Hampshire, one of several states that maintain strict information security breach disclosure laws.

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Data potentially leaked included names, addresses and social security numbers. Approximately 550 records were involved.

Aviva said it had removed the affected hardware from service. Workers whose login details were potentially disclosed by the breach have been issued with new credentials.

The insurance firm is in the process of writing to individuals potentially affected by the security snafu. The firm is offering a year's free identity protection at no cost as a means of protecting its clients from potential harm.

Copies of Aviva's letter explain that the incident occurred while "our company was conducting online research to locate the most current address information for policyholders or beneficiaries whose correspondence had been returned as undeliverable".

From that, and the fact the new employee login passwords had to be issued, it's possible to speculate that the machine used to carry out the searches was infected by a password stealing Trojan of some sort.

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Aviva has pledged to improve its security to prevent a repetition of the potentially embarrassing, though all too commonplace, data security cock-up. At least in this case only a small number of data records were involved and there's no evidence that this has led onto incidents of actual fraud, always the main worry in cases where sensitive personal information spills out into public. ®

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