Enabling Personal Firewalls

Q: Enabling Personal Firewalls

Overview

IS&T recommends using operating system firewalls when using Windows, Macintosh and Linux operating systems. As with any computer safety measure, always check with your local IT support provider prior to enabling a personal firewall.

What is a Personal Firewall?

A personal firewall is software installed on a PC that controls communication to and from that PC when connected to a network or the internet. It provides a line of defense against someone who might try to access your computer from outside the firewall without your permission.

What Does it Protect Against?

A personal firewall can help prevent unauthorized access to your computer's files through shared services by blocking unsolicited communications. Through intrusion detection, the firewall allows a connection to be terminated or blocked when it suspects an intrusion is being attempted. Some worms can find their way onto your computer through an open firewall.

Tip: Enabled firewalls are one part of basic safe computing good habits. A firewall does not detect or disable viruses or worms if they are already on your computer. For this, you will want to install anti-virus and anti-spyware software on your computer. You will also want to keep your software up to date to prevent malware from taking advantage of software vulnerabilities in Windows and other programs.

Enabling Personal Firewalls

For any questions about enabling or configuring personal firewalls, contact the IS&T Help Desk or your local IT support provider.

Windows

Windows XP, Vista and Windows 7 have built-in firewalls that are turned on by default. You only need to configure Windows Firewall if you are having a problem connecting to the Internet. These web pages provide further information about Windows Firewall:

Windows XP: Securing Your Computer Before Going Online
Windows Vista: Windows Security Center
Windows 7: Windows Firewall

Macintosh

Mac OS X systems have built-in firewalls. The firewall configurations can be found in System Preferences > Security & Privacy.

Linux

Linux has a built-in firewall. See Red Hat Enterprise Linux 3: Chapter 20, Basic Firewall Configuration.