Cyber security - who says we are safe?

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Independent expert in cyber security

Mike StJohn-Green CEng, FIET, has just finished work at GCHQ after 31 years, following an early career in MOD. He spent the past three years in the UK Cabinet Office, in the Office of Cyber Security and Information Assurance (OCSIA). For the most of 2011, Mike and his team had been preparing the UK policy position for the London Conference on Cyberspace in November 2011 and working on the National Cyber Security Strategy published also in November 2011. His recent work has been concerned with setting adequate standards in cyber security – who determines what is "secure enough" in light of the pernicious threats we now face? Mike is an engineer by training and previously was Deputy Director of CESG, the Information Assurance arm of GCHQ. He has held a variety of engineering and science posts in GCHQ and MOD.

Synopsis

Who says we're safe in cyberspace? Our modern lifestyle now depends on this rapidly developing man-made environment yet we find ourselves ill-equipped to behave safely and securely. Whether as private individuals or large corporations, we lack the instinctive sense of the risks we are exposed to in cyberspace. And when it comes to protective measures, how do we balance risks and benefits?

The threats are often invisible and the damage is not immediately recognisable. Our actions, as system designers or service providers will expose others to risks.

There is talk of laws, rules and standards to regulate this cyber environment. But who should set the standards of good behaviour and adequate security in cyberspace and what might they look like? And are there perverse outcomes to avoid?