

NSClean Information

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NSClean Information

"Why is there an NSClean program?"

The author wishes to make it absolutely clear that he has no axe to grind with Netscape Communications Corporation and its fine "Netscape Navigator product." The author uses it regularly to access World Wide Web sites and newsgroups. In the author's opinion no finer browser software exists.

The author created NSClean in order to address the concerns of other users of Netscape who discovered that files and information were retained in their computer after leaving Netscape. These files contained data of all of their activities while surfing the net. This caused many of them great distress. As more friends became aware of the author's knowledge of the inner workings of Netscape and the author's ability to purge information from Netscape, the author felt it useful to create the NSClean software to automate these tasks as more people came looking for file surgery on their computers.

In early versions of the Netscape browser, Netscape provided a simple mechanism called "bookmarks" which allowed you to mark a new location you visited so you could easily return there in the future. Information stored in the BOOKMARK file could be easily edited and culled using a standard text editor program, even the Windows Notepad applet. The newer versions of Netscape create Bookmark files that cannot be edited or changed. Netscape actually warns users not to edit the BOOKMARK file!

Version 2.0 (Navigator) and later versions added several new features including the URL memory window. This window is on the main Netscape screen and shows the last ten sites you visited, including those you chose NOT to bookmark. The URL memory window allows you to recall a site when the "back" button did not return you to a previous site. However this information is retained when you exit Netscape and stored in a file.

Imagine that you visited a site that you really didn't want anyone else to know you ended up at. It would still be listed in the system and would be available to snoopers who knew where to look for such information or worse, children in the house who might find inappropriate locations from this listing. Obviously there are circumstances where a user might not want this information to be retained. Netscape does not provide any means to delete this information. NSClean does.

Newer versions of Netscape also maintain a list of EVERYTHING you have done, everything you have seen, the locations, filenames and pictures viewed or downloaded in what Netscape calls its "history file." Since Netscape cannot use this history file for any means of returning to a site visited previously, there is no logical reason for this data to be kept. The history file continues to grow over time even though the user cannot make use of the information contained within. There is also an amount of encrypted data within this file which seems to serve no purpose that can be determined. A paranoid would most certainly look upon this file as some sort of Big Brother database for nefarious purposes. The author makes no judgement other than not liking unknown data on his machine and suspects others would agree.

Netscape also maintains a database containing a listing of all newsgroups read with specific message numbers recorded in it. This function does appear to have a legitimate use, that of preventing you from rereading articles you've seen before. However, like the other files, it records a listing of the newsgroups you read including those that might be (ahem) "unsavory" in the eyes of snoopers who might look over your computer's contents. The author feels there are probably some Netscape users who would rather not have certain newsgroups to be potentially revealed to others. Netscape does not provide a means of cleaning this information out either.

Netscape also provides a "cache" system which stores all of the screens and pictures you've seen on the world wide web. Oddly, the information stored in this "cache" is only useful in quickly redrawing screens you've seen before only during the current session. If you exit Netscape, or Netscape crashes forcing you to run it again, all of this information which is still stored on your machine is of no use at all. Thus there is really no reason to keep the cache once you have exited Netscape. The CACHE directory

which contains all these files can get huge indeed over time and can waste many megabytes of hard disk space for no good reason. Netscape does provide a means of eliminating the cache files after a set number of days, but now and then you might want to clear out the clutter at will.

Recently, "bugs" in Netscape were widely publicized in the media proclaiming significant security breaches. Netscape assured anxious users that the security issues would be fixed. Most notable was one whereby a web server at a remote location could poll Netscape and extract your email name and location without your knowledge or permission. This flaw turned out to be intrinsic in the "Java" script language provided with Netscape to allow viewing of animated graphics on web pages. Others opined that more information than just the user's email address could be gotten via this breach.

Although the "security breach" was not Netscape's fault (it was a bug in the Java language made by Sun Microsystems), paranoids believed that since Netscape gave away copies of their client software and sells their Web Server software at a stiff price, there is possibly an incentive for Netscape to provide server customers a means to better track their sites and determine who visits and what they do while at an internet web site.

Netscape also provides a number of encryption engines which could conceivably be used to hide a download of information on personal internet habits to a Netscape-based web host. The author believes that all of these systems are likely to be innocuous but hey, paranoids have enemies too. Combining all of these concerns with the simple truth that those who provide content truly want to have access to as much information as possible about those who visit their sites, it seems a means of controlling personal confidential information on one's computer would serve to give an internet user greater safety and security and prevent the possibility of information being obtained about the user and their habits would be a good idea.

In fact the inspiration to write this software was based on a workplace situation where several network users who websurfed during their lunch hour were concerned that coworkers who maintain their computers might discover that they were visiting sites that might be frowned upon by management.

Enter NSClean. NSClean is designed to search through your Netscape setup and delete the data you decide you want to delete. NSClean removes the information giving you a clean slate any time you use it without harming your Netscape setup or any of the files you need. By cleaning out this unnecessary data, NSClean also frees up valuable hard disk space that would otherwise be wasted. NSClean is designed to be used ONLY with Netscape versions 2.0 and newer. NSClean CANNOT be used with Microsoft's "Internet Explorer" or other products. It is not contemplated that a version of this program for these other products will be created.

NSClean allows you to select which information you wish to have deleted. If you are concerned that your employer, friends, family or spies in black helicopters might be able to find out what you've been doing (especially on company time), NSClean will purge the incriminating information from the bowels of the Netscape file system. By selecting which information you want automatically killed using a simple checkbox menu, NSClean will purge ONLY those areas that are of concern to you while preserving other information as you desire.

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"Java" is a registered trademark of Sun Microsystems, Inc.

NSClean Information

"Using NSClean"

PLEASE read the checklist information carefully before you make any selections. It is possible that there are areas of Netscape you may not wish to clean for various reasons. Once NSClean cleans up a file, all information contained within is forever lost. KNOW what you're doing before you start making choices!

NSClean provides a very simple, single screen control panel. There are no complicated menus or other complex setups or structures in NSClean. NSClean provides 6 options on a checklist to permit the user to configure NSClean as desired on the fly. By merely clicking on any of the options, they will be enabled and a checkmark will appear indicating a desire to kill this item. If the checkmark next to the item is blank, then that action will not be taken.

Once the configuration is selected, a simple click of the "OK" button will cause NSClean to instantly delete the desired information from the Netscape file system. To make NSClean easier to use, the settings are saved by NSClean so they will always come up in the same configuration unless you decide to change any of them. Only those functions which have a checkmark next to them will occur when you hit the "OK" button.

If you decide you don't want to delete anything, simply click on "Cancel" and no action will be taken at all. NSClean will then exit cleanly. In addition, clicking on "Cancel" leaves your checked settings as they were set before making any selections. Configuration settings are updated only when you click on "OK."

[Selecting checklist items](#)

NSClean Information

"Selecting checklist items"

The checklist buttons are associated with the cleaning of a specific file or group of files. A check mark will appear next to those that have been activated. Those items which are not checked are ignored and left alone by NSClean. Please be sure to read about each button before you select any:

Use alias User ID while online
Kill records of news site visits
Kill records in history database
Kill records in URL window list
Kill records in 'cookie file' list
Kill all your bookmark settings
Kill cache containing old activity

When you click on the "OK" button to perform the purge, the program will save the current checklist settings, perform the cleanup and exit automatically. Please read through the above items to determine which items you wish to set NSClean to remove for you.

NSClean Information

"Kill records of news site visits"

This item cleans the news resource file which contains a database of all of the newsgroups you have visited (including naughty ones) and the numbers of each and every message you have read. This file can be useful in keeping you from wasting time and money reading news articles you have seen before.

However, if you have children or others who you don't want to know where you've visited, this will clear out any trace of your having been there. It's a small price for the eternally paranoid.

NSClean Information

"Kill records in history database"

This item clears out the Netscape "history" file along with other database files and encryption tools. Once cleared out of data, Netscape is instructed to make brand new blank copies to replace the original files and their contents. The Netscape history and related files contain a complete listing of every single picture, file, site and address you've ever seen. It maintains a list of all the web sites, gopher sites, ftp sites and every local file you've looked at in your browser (including confidential internal documents) and who knows what else buried in its encrypted machine code portions.

Of all the portions of Netscape that can raise the hackles of those who have actually examined the contents of the Netscape history files, this one is the most potentially dangerous of all. Clearing out these files has no impact whatsoever on Netscape and there is seemingly no reason to keep these other than to possibly permit others to know what you do while you're on the net. The author cannot fathom why such a file system exists or why such a detailed accounting of a user's online activities needs to be maintained.

NSClean Information

"Kill records in URL window list"

This item clears the contents of the cutout at the top of your screen where your home page address normally appears. If you've never changed the "preferences" configuration in Netscape, the window points you at "http://home.netscape.com/." If you click on the little down-arrow at the right of the box, Netscape will show you a picklist of the last ten places or files you've seen.

Netscape does not allow you to edit or delete any of these, so if you have visited a site you don't want others to see in this list of "last 10," you have no choice but to delete all of the contents of this window area. This button does this but does NOT delete the normal home page setting.

NSClean Information

"Kill records in 'cookie file' list"

Netscape maintains a file called "COOKIES." Netscape admits that the "cookie" file is there for sites you call to fill up with data they want to tag your computer with, and allows them to recover any information stored within the cookie file. Netscape admits that the cookie file's purpose is to allow sites you visit to gather information about you and your habits, likes and desires.

It is further claimed that sites can only retrieve cookie information they have setup and that they somehow cannot find anything else contained in the cookie file. The author has seen little use of the cookie file, but has occasionally found data buried in it, sometimes encrypted so the net surfer cannot read what is actually in the file. The author has a belief that if the user wanted sites to have personal information, it should be asked for and the user should have the opportunity to decide whether or not to submit it.

NSClean Information

"Kill all your bookmark settings"

Netscape contains a bookmark database in which all bookmarks are kept. In earlier versions of Netscape, the user could use a text editor or the windows notepad to edit the contents of this file to remove bookmarks that were no longer needed or desired. With version 2.0 of Netscape, the user can no longer edit this file.

As a result, sites that had interesting names that turned out to be porn or worse remain in the listing for posterity or for the user's children to find and then visit themselves. Selecting this option will kill ALL bookmarks, so you should have a list of desired bookmarks written down or saved elsewhere.

In future versions of NSClean, you will be able to actually edit the bookmark file rather than purging it entirely. For now, be really sure you want to kill ALL of your bookmarks if you click on this.

NSClean Information

"Kill cache containing old activity"

Netscape creates (and uses) an entire directory of files which contain the actual text and all of the pictures from each and every web site you visit. While you are in a Netscape online session, the information contained in the cache directory is used to repaint a screen from a site you visited during this online session so the whole screen doesn't have to be loaded again from the site. This saves a considerable amount of time downloading the same screens all over again.

However - once you exit Netscape, or if it gets lost among the links to other sites, or if Netscape crashes, this information is useless. Netscape does not have the capability (yet) to use any of this information should you exit Netscape and go back in again. The cache directory can get filled up with tens of megabytes of useless data that fills up your hard disk.

A nosy person could go into file manager and look through the various sites you've visited if they have access to your machine and can use a graphics browser to look at any or all of the pictures recorded in the cache directory as well. Netscape does have an option built in to purge the contents of this directory, but it isn't all that easy to locate and use. Netscape also allows you to turn off the caching, but most users find the page rebuild feature while online too useful to turn off. Clicking here will allow you to dump the cache area whenever you want.

NSClean Information

"Having difficulty?"

FILE NOT FOUND - This is the result of a misconfiguration of NSClean. Run NS-DEMO. If the configuration is wrong, NS-DEMO will ask you to input the proper directory where Netscape is installed. IMPORTANT: If you change the directory, you must exit NSClean and then restart it for any changes to take effect.

If you're not sure where Netscape is, hit the CANCEL button and use File Manager to find the directory where Netscape is. You should find a file within it called NETSCAPE.INI. This is the file that wasn't found.

Then run NS-DEMO once again, click on File on the menu header, then click on "Select Netscape Directory." Type in the whole path (without the \NETSCAPE.INI) and if you do it right, NS-DEMO will accept the input. You can quit NS-DEMO at this point since NSClean is now also properly configured.

If you are using a 32 bit version of Netscape with Windows95 you shouldn't see this option. If the information is in the Windows95 registry it should have been automatically found.

If NSClean is in the wrong Netscape setup (many people have more than one), run NSDEMO and click on "File." Then select "Select Netscape Directory" and type in the directory where Netscape is. If you want NSClean to use the Windows95 registry for the info, click on CANCEL to make NSClean use that instead of the NETSCAPE.INI file.

Please visit <http://www.wizvax.net/kevinmca/> for more information.

NSClean Information

"Use alias User ID while online"

Most people mistakenly believe "cookies" are the culprit when they suddenly begin receiving junk email. Nope. Although cookies are often part of the process, the actual snatching of your identity comes from CGI and PERL scripts that make your browser tell them your email address.

Selecting this function writes a predetermined alias to Netscape in place of your email name. This alias will be snatched instead of your real name info. You can even use the alias to post semi-anonymously to newsgroups. The alias will show publicly, but your service provider can still determine it's you should you use this feature for criminal purposes.

When selected, by default NSClean will replace your name when checked with "I'm NSClean" as your username and "Oh_No_You_Don't@not.on.this.net" as your email address. If you want to change it, you can always edit the NSCLEAN.INI file in your directory. Uncheck this item and your normal username and email address will be sent. Handy, no?

