● **INTERNET SECURITY SUITE**

ZoneAlarm Internet Security Suite 6

PC PRO A LIST

PRICE £43 (£50 inc VAT)   **UPGRADE** £17 (£20 inc VAT)

SUPPLIER www.zonelabs.com   **INTERNET** www.zonelabs.com

VERDICT The addition of spyware detection to an already strong portfolio – including the excellent firewall – makes this the best all-in-one security suite on the market.

When we reviewed the previous version of ZoneAlarm Internet Security Suite (*see issue 125, p144*), we said the only thing preventing it from being a real champion was the lack of a dedicated spyware scanner. Well, now it's got one. The kernel-level spyware prevention integrates fully with the anti-virus module to present a single, consolidated interface to control the detection and removal of viruses, spyware and malware.

Ease of use has always been one of ZoneAlarm's strengths and, while you can tweak and configure every component if you wish, the default automatic spyware treatment setting is as fire-and-forget as you could want. Signature updates for anti-virus and spyware are handled automatically in the background and with little impact upon system resources. And if spyware is detected, the program provides detailed information and advice regarding treatment.

It works too. In testing, the spyware scanner was effective against homepage hijacking attempts as well as unwanted installation of browser helper objects. It even survived our serving up a full menu of spyware nasties, matching class leader Spy Sweeper for detection effectiveness. The only negative is that the full system scan took a relatively slow eight minutes, 24 seconds to complete the scanning of 112,251 files. However, having completed this once, you only need to leave the scanner in Intelligent mode, which scans fewer files and does so in a quarter of the time.

There isn't much that's actually new with the anti-virus tool beyond the spyware integration, but there wasn't much wrong with the excellent Computer Associates' module anyway. We were pleased to see the addition of a pause/continue function for the scanner though, and a quarantine management area for those infected files you don't want to clean.

Should you install an application that executes a spyware component that would otherwise burrow deep into the OS, or fall foul of an attempted root kit exploit (enabling direct manipulation of OS information at the lowest level), another new feature comes to the rescue:

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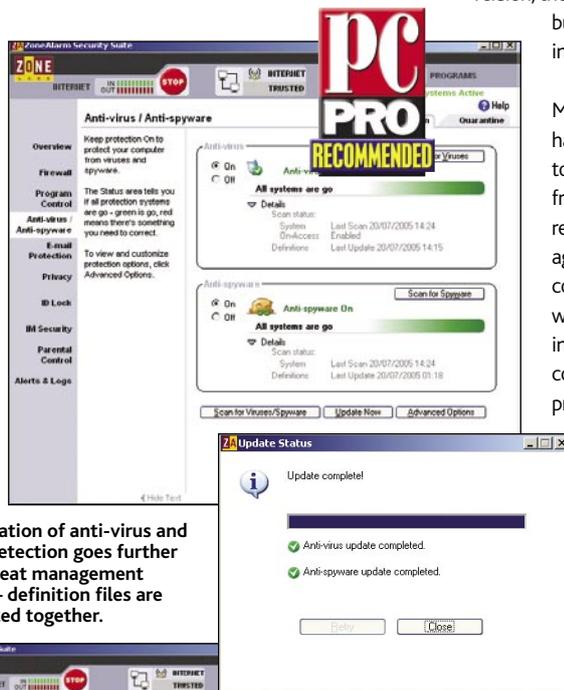
The integration of anti-virus and spyware detection goes further than the neat management interface – definition files are also updated together.

Although fire-and-forget works across the suite, fine-tuning your settings is easier with the improved interface.

the Triple Defence Firewall. Effectively, what you get is the proven ZoneAlarm stateful stealth firewall to guard the network perimeter, while a second firewall wraps itself around every software application to protect good programs from bad. The third layer is an OS firewall to protect the OS, Registry and file system from attack.

Thanks to the SmartDefence Advisor introduced by Zone Labs last year, the firewall is as straightforward as the anti-spyware tool, because the Advisor passes default policy from the SmartDefence team at Zone Labs directly to the user. The SmartDefence service also provides real-time updates and new attack-protection capabilities, and is pretty much the brains behind most ZoneAlarm services (from the DefenceNet community input for spyware attacks, to the Advisor for deploying policy automatically). Another welcome new feature is the automatic kill control: this gives SmartDefence Advisor the ability to disable programs attempting dangerous or damaging activity without the need for user input.

The previous version of ZoneAlarm wasn't too hot when it came to keeping out spam, letting too much slip through the filter and not reaching the 90 per cent success rate to pass our security suite Labs test. We're glad to report this has been addressed: when we ran the same tests on this version, there were still hardly any false positives, but the spam filtering itself had increased to a respectable 93 per cent.

The anti-phishing feature of the MailFrontier-driven anti-spam module has also been enhanced and was able to identify all the eBay/PayPal/banking fraud emails we threw at it, and represents an excellent defensive barrier against identity-theft scammers. In conjunction with the existing ID lock, which alerts the user whenever personal information is about to leave the computer, and the host file lock that prevents hackers from modifying the local host files, ID-theft protection is superbly covered here.

Elsewhere, Zone Labs hasn't fiddled too much. The automatic network detection has been tweaked for Wi-Fi and will now identify unsecured wireless networks, automatically setting the appropriate security levels to protect the computer. Instant Messaging protection, parental control features, ad blocking, cache cleaning, mobile code control and email attachment quarantining remain as impressive as ever.

Another area where version 6 impresses is value for money: at £50 including VAT, it's competitive with the latest security suites from Norton (£55), McAfee (£50) and the previous A-List title holder F-Secure (£45). While F-Secure is £5 cheaper, it lacks a privacy component.

This price competitiveness, together with the additional polish that Zone Labs, under Check Point ownership, has brought to this new version, lifts it above the competition. If you're looking for an all-in-one security suite, with all the central management and lack of compatibility problems that brings, ZoneAlarm Internet Security Suite 6 not only does everything efficiently and intuitively – it does it at the right price.

DAVEY WINDER

PC PRO RATINGS

EASE OF USE	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★☆
OVERALL	★★★★☆

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 SE onwards.