

There are now at least 44 major virus strains which can infect your Archimedes. And while this is not a patch on the thousands which haunt PC users, it is nevertheless a serious state of affairs. One of the latest, called Foodex, which appeared in three Exeter schools in May, is capable of wiping all data from hard and floppy discs. It manifests itself inside host applications as a Basic program with the name Fcodex, and modifies the !Run file of the application to ensure that Foodex is run each time the application itself is run.

Most viruses work in this way, though many are called by modified !Boot rather than !Run files. Figure 1 shows files used by each of the 44 virus strains. Note however that some use varying aliases, so you can't always be sure to spot one by comparing filenames. Moreover, many are activated by the mere act of the host application being seen in a directory viewer. In other words, if you open your root directory, and it contains infected applications, each manifestation of the virus will be run at the moment the directory is opened. At this point it could wipe your hard disc. Unfortunately this does not take long, since viruses don't tend to delete files one at a time, they just write rubbish over the catalogue information. But that is enough!

Of the 44 known virus types, just 7 are classed as malicious:

Foodex, Parasite, Penicillin, Sprite, T2,  
Terminator, Thanatos (alias RISCOSExt)

so it is worth keeping an eye out for these in particular.

One useful trick when looking for viruses is to open directory viewers with Ctrl held down. This ensures that the !Boot files of the applications within it are not run, and gives you a chance to inspect before an infection can spread - or better still, exit the Desktop and use the command line to examine a suspect disc. But the only real answer is to use some form of virus protection. RISC User has featured two useful virus protection programs: Watchdog (4:4), and Virus Alert (4:8 & 4:9). Both these are non-virus-specific, and are able to warn of virus activity without specific knowledge of a particular virus.

## Virus Update

Lee Calcraft reports on the viral threat to your Archimedes.

Other software, such as the public domain Guardian and Pineapple Software's Killer look for the identifying characteristics of viruses known to them. Such an approach is generally much more foolproof, but obviously relies on the anti-virus software being thoroughly up to date.

Pineapple

Software's Killer application (developed in conjunction with Acorn) is particularly effective. It can detect and destroy all 44 of the strains mentioned above. And also comes with a background module which can detect the presence of most viruses without the need to scan each disc. Network licences are available for Killer, and this is highly appropriate, since schools seem to be a most fertile place



Figure 1.  
A gallery of the infamous: the 44 strains of Archimedes virus

As we reported in the article Viruses and the Law (RISC User 4:8) the intentional distribution of computer viruses is punishable by prison sentences of up to 5 years. Anyone with information about computer viruses should contact:

The Computer Crimes Unit  
New Scotland Yard,  
2 Richbell Place,  
London WC1 8SD.

