Govt issues IE security warning

By Emily Bourke for AM

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The Federal Government has ramped up
warnings about Microsoft's web browser
Internet Explorer, which has come under
attack from hackers.

The Government is warning that people risk
having their computers infiltrated and
passwords stolen unless they install
temporary fixes from Microsoft or use
alternative browsers.

The Government says Microsoft has acknowledged all recent versions of the
program are vulnerable.

It also says people should remember to regularly update their security software
and change passwords frequently.

The French and German governments have warned internet users in Europe to
avoid Microsoft's popular web browser.

The concern follows revelations that hackers used a crack in Internet Explorer to
mount an attack on Google and a number of other companies.

Senior lecturer in network engineering at Melbourne's RMIT University, Mark
Gregory, says industry and governments are not prepared for the changing
threats to cyberspace.

"The digital network is like the wild west. It is unregulated," he said.

"It is being used in ways that it wasn't meant to be used and we need to get
organisations, companies and governments ... focused on taking action to make
the digital network more secure for the general public."

Bill Caelli, from the Information Security Institute at the Queensland University of
Technology, says the Government and regulators must step in to protect internet
users.

"How many builders have put smoke detectors in the new homes and houses? How many people have put fences around their pools to protect children?" he said.

"So safety and security has never, ever been market-driven. It's always been driven by regulatory [sic], by society itself, and that's the role of government."

The Government says Microsoft has not solved the security glitch and Australians should use alternative browsers.

Dr Gregory says it is good advice.

"There are other browsers that are available that appear to be being targeted less by the hackers and by these organisations than what Internet Explorer is being targeted," he said.

"I don't think there was any inference in what they said that Internet Explorer was any more deficient in terms of security than any of the other browsers, just that it was being targeted more.

"On that basis you'd have to argue that if security was a principal concern then using another browser would be wise until the incidence is reduced."

Editor's note (19 January 2010): This story has been amended to reflect the fact that web users can install temporary fixes from Microsoft to reduce their risk.