

Privacy Tip of the Week

West Virginia Executive Branch Privacy Policy: Security Safeguards

Fact or Fiction?

Question:

I just received an e-mail from a good friend, asking me to participate in a fundraiser to pay medical bills for a young adult with a serious medical condition. Can I forward the e-mail to all of my friends and co-workers?

Answer:

We've all gotten an email from someone we know warning us of some type of impending crisis. The crisis may be a privacy or security issue, such as the imminent publication of a cell phone directory that can be used by telemarketers or dire warnings about viruses and other malware. It could alert you to a scam. Or the email may be a personal appeal, such as requests to help a child who is dying of cancer. These emails generally urge you to forward the message to all your friends.

In many cases, the emails contain misinformation and inaccurate statements. By forwarding them, you cause unnecessary fear. You are also consuming computer bandwidth and OT resources. In the worse case, the email may instruct the reader to take steps that can actually compromise the person's computer security settings.

So what do you do if you receive an email warning or chain letter?

Do NOT forward the email to others.

OT policy prohibits "any use in relation to participating in chain letters or unauthorized chat programs, or forwarding or responding to SPAM."

- Forward the message to the OT Service Desk only. The Service Desk can evaluate the email and decide if a warning needs to be made to computer users in your Department. If so, OT will provide specific instructions on what users should do.
- Note that even if a warning (such as virus threat) is true, OT may not need to warn users. For example, OT may have already addressed the threat through its own antivirus program or other technology. In this case, the situation is handled without any panic or unnecessary worry on the part of the user community.