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# Microsoft admits part of Windows source code has leaked

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Portions of Microsoft's Windows source code have been leaked over the Internet, the company said yesterday.

Microsoft spokesman Tom Pilla today told The Associated Press that some incomplete portions of the Windows 2000 and Windows NT4.0 source code had been "illegally made available on the Internet".

Several versions of the operating system, including the ones containing leaked code, are used on hundreds of millions of computers worldwide. Access to the source code could allow hackers to exploit the operating system and attack machines running some versions of Windows.

Such access could also provide a competitive edge to Microsoft rivals, who would gain a much better understanding of the inner workings of Microsoft's technology.

Pilla said the company was made aware of the leak yesterday and was investigating. He did not know how much of the code had been leaked, when the leak occurred or how many people might have gained access to it. The company could not immediately pinpoint the source of the leak, and has contacted law enforcement authorities, he said.

Pilla said there was no indication the leak was a result of a breach of Microsoft's corporate network, and there was no known immediate impact on Microsoft customers.

Analysts and security experts cautioned that it was hard to assess any potential damage the leak could cause, since so few details were available.

"Frankly, I'm not sure anybody can fully assess that, other than Microsoft," said Al Gillen, research director for systems software at research group IDC.

The leak could potentially put more Windows users at risk because it opens the door to more people finding vulnerabilities in Microsoft's code - and using them in malicious ways, eEye chief hacking officer Marc Maiffret said

That could, in turn, wreak havoc on Microsoft's ability to respond with fixes in a controlled manner.

Some experts said it seemed more likely the leak could be most valuable to Microsoft rivals.

"What people could learn from it has the potential to make other organisations that are building competing products ... make products that can compete with (Microsoft) more effectively," Gillen said.

But others noted that the greatest damage may be to Microsoft's reputation.

"It seems unlikely this is going to create a material, significant security problem," said Rob Enderle, a technology expert and principal analyst with the Enderle Group. "It's more embarrassing than anything else because it makes it look like Microsoft can't control its code."

**Sam, Varghese adds:** Earlier, posts to the Full_disclosure vulnerability mailing list said rumours were floating around on some websites and internet relay chat channels that the complete source code to Windows NT and Windows 2000 was available for download.

Some posters provided links to sites where the code could be downloaded but the links had gone dead.

Nearly four years ago, the tech site Wired reported that the source code to a future version of Windows, codenamed Whistler, had leaked out. There was no confirmation of this.

The same year Microsoft admitted that its corporate computer network had been broken into by attackers who had gained access to the Windows source code; however, the company's chief executive officer, Steve Ballmer, insisted that there had been no tampering with key programs.

Microsoft has provided Windows source code to some businesses under its Enterprise Source Licensing Program.

Some countries have also been given a peek at the source, among them Russia and China.