Reader O. J. Jonasson, CMC, CISSP, SCSE, SCSA, a security consultant, very kindly sent me the following note and has allowed me to quote him:

> In the course of conducting a Technology Planning project for a small local government client, I came across an item that I thought you might amusing.

During interviews, one of their technical support staff was relating their problems with spyware and I politely agreed it’s a nuisance these days. But added, that with products like Ad-Aware for home PCs and network appliances like the Fortiguard series for blocking spyware at the network perimeter, its certainly manageable.

He seemed unimpressed and proceeded to tell me of one scan he had performed with Ad-Aware on a desktop in their Aquatic Center that found 12,031 spyware instances. He added that, to him, it was a little more than a nuisance.

Based on my normal skepticism and years of tongue-lashing from my senior consulting partners over supporting documentation and “best evidence,” I quite naturally, asked for a copy of the scan – which is attached. [The image clearly shows the 12,031 hits.]

I imagine it should set the baseline for the _Guinness Book of World Records_ – unfortunately, they don’t have a category for spyware. Perhaps [Network World Fusion] should start their own.<

Shortly after receiving Mr Jonasson’s story, reader Ken Ramsey sent me a pointer to a recent article in the 27 January 2005 issue of the excellent “WindowsSecrets” newsletter. Author and editor Brian Livingston reports at length on a recent research study which suggests that even the best anti-spyware products caught barely two-thirds of the test pests implanted on PCs; some of the most popular were down below 50%. It would be important, however, to examine the methodology to find out what pests were used to infest the sample machines and whether they represent the “wild-type” infestations found in real-world machines. Similar issues arose in the early 1990s when the National Computer Security Association (NCSA, later ICSA Labs) started testing antivirus products for certification.

Livingston also mentions an interesting study of real-world infection and infestation rates (high) and security measures (poor) published in October 2004 using 329 “typical dial-up and broadband computer users.” The research was carried out by AOL and a new “NCSA:” the National Cyber Security Alliance.

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For Further Reading:
A Master’s degree in the management of information assurance in 18 months of online study from Norwich University – see <http://www3.norwich.edu/msia> for details.

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