

PRODUCT REVIEWS

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Windows 95 file protection software

Win Secure It leaves back door open

By Joe Peschel

Finding solid, complete security for stand-alone Windows 95 systems is a Herculean task. With security holes in Win95 big enough to drive a chariot through, it's a challenge for even the biggest names in the business, much less a fledgling start-up such as Shetef Solutions Corp., an Israeli developer.

Nonetheless, Shetef's Web page hypes its product, Win Secure It 1.20, as "the security solution for Windows 95." I wouldn't go that far: It's a high-quality file-protection tool but a lousy security utility. If you want a decent tool to prevent desktop mistakes, it'll do the job admirably. But if you want to protect critical data from hackers, look elsewhere.

Win Secure It is a password-protected program that lets you place restrictions on

files so that they cannot be deleted, edited, copied, read, or executed. You can, if you like, set read-only restrictions or hide files and entire folders. A browse feature, new in Version 1.20, makes it easier to enter restrictions. Win Secure It will also detect -- either covertly or overtly -- things such as incorrect password attempts and file tampering. Then it reports on the intrusion after the next successful log-in. A history of the intrusions is kept in an access log that can be cleared after you review it. Other niceties include allowing you to log in or out whenever you please and requiring password re-entry after 6 hours.

The restrictions worked as touted under Windows 95 in its usual mode. First, I barred access to text and document files. Without the correct password, I

could no longer edit the files with the parent program or a text editor, could not view them with Quick View, and could not summon them with a hex editor or debugger in a DOS window. The same was true of other application data types.

Likewise, without the proper Win Secure It password, restrictions on America Online and Netscape kept me off the Internet. After I hid an entire directory, the files appeared to be nonexistent in Windows and in a DOS window without the proper password. When I logged in with the correct password, the log file displayed all of my attempted intrusions.

In a basic security package, I expect to see password protection, several degrees of file protection in Windows 95's various modes, detailed intrusion

logging, and file encryption. Win Secure It has most of those features except the last. My disappointment with Win Secure It, aside from its lack of an encryptor, is that you hardly need to be a caricature with a ponytail and thick glasses to defeat the program.

The company says its customers aren't worried about hackers, but breaking its security isn't even a matter of cracking the password, debugging and tracing the program, or editing the Registry. Boot to DOS, and you can edit any file or view any hidden directory, despite the restrictions. Boot Windows in safe mode and you can run most restricted applications. To run any restricted application, boot in safe mode and copy the executable file or files to another directory. Reboot Windows 95 in its usual mode and run

the program from Explorer. You won't be asked for a password, and the intrusion log will not detect these trespasses.

Of course, this is not nearly as bad as the first version, released in early April, in which you could hit Ctrl-Alt-Delete and end the task for Win Secure It. The first incarnation also didn't let you check in and out of the utility, and you had to reboot to set new restrictions. Version 1.20, released on May 9, corrected these shortcomings.

In a future release, I'd like to see a Windows safe mode and DOS-based protection. File encryption would be welcomed, too, but often companies make the mistake of using a proprietary encryption algorithm -- meaning, usually, that it's secure only until someone discovers, cracks, and posts it on the Internet.

Sometimes it's just a poor implementation. For instance, the Windows .PWL files are originally encrypted with a 32-bit RC4 key instead of the service pack's 128-bit key. Shetef says that file encryption is unlikely, because its customers are more afraid of losing data than having it stolen.

A similar utility from Kent Marsh Ltd., WinShield, protects the Windows 95 desktop. (See Product Reviews, March 4, page 98.) It performs no file protection, only desktop protection, but its developers refer to it as a configuration-protection utility, not as a security tool. Similarly, Shetef would better serve its customers if it called its product a file-protection utility. As such, it rates highly; it prevents accidents and casual snooping. As a security tool it rates poorly.

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Protection vs. security

Win Secure It is more of a file-protection utility than a solid security program

Thumbs up:

- Password protection upon standard Windows 95 entry.
- Prevents file deletion, copying, and editing; hides files and folders in the Win95 environment.
- Unauthorized Windows entry and file tampering are logged.
- Prevents use of programs under Windows.
- Prevents DOS programs from being executed under Windows.
- Log-in and log-out options.
- Does not require a reboot to apply restrictions.
- Can run in stealth mode so that intruders will not realize their actions are being logged.
- Does not let an intruder end the task with the Ctrl-Alt-Delete sequence.
- Asks for password after 6 hours.

Thumbs down:

- No password required in a DOS environment.
- No file protection in a DOS environment.
- No DOS logging.
- No DOS log-in or log-out.
- No file encryption.

THE BOTTOM LINE: GOOD

Win Secure It 1.20

Win Secure It is a useful utility for protecting and hiding files under Windows 95 but shouldn't be relied upon as a strong security tool.

Pros: Prevents altering, copying, and deleting files under Windows 95; hides files and folders; keeps track of unauthorized access through Windows 95.

Cons: No protection in a DOS environment or under a safe boot; no encryption.

Shetef Solutions Corp., Ness-Ziona, Israel; 972-4-8260064; fax: 972-6-271210;
<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/dascalu>.

Price: \$29

Platform: Windows 95.

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