the **Availability Digest**

Keylogger Found on HP Laptops
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A 'keylogger' is a keystroke recording tool. It covertly records every keystroke that a user makes on his laptop; and the keylogger can, if desired, send the entered text to a remote location. The person using the keyboard is unaware that his actions are being monitored. Keyloggers are most often used for the purpose of stealing passwords or other confidential information. A keylogger can be implemented via either software or hardware.

Security researcher Michael Myng, who goes by the pseudonym ZWClose, has identified keylogging code in HP laptops. Further investigation by HP revealed that the keylogging code is embedded in the Synaptics touchpad drivers of hundreds of models of HP laptops dating back to 2012.

I use an HP laptop. Am I concerned? I should be, and I am. However, it seems that there is no evidence that the keylogger has ever been put into play to record and send confidential information.

Synaptics

In its early years, the laptop industry was struggling to make devices thinner. The spherical trackballs used in laptops at the time proved to be a barrier to this goal. Recognizing this issue, Synaptics developed the world's first touchpad, which Apple adopted in 1995.

The touchpad was subsequently adopted by other computer manufacturers and established touchpads as a standard feature in notebook PCs.

The HP Laptop Keylogger

The keylogging code is a standard tool in all Synaptics touchpad drivers. Synaptics stated that the technology is not intended to be a keylogger but rather a debugging tool. It was left in the touchpad drivers to help developers track down and fix problems with the touchpad.

ZWClose found that the keylogger saved scan codes to a WPP trace (Windows software trace preprocessor).

HP discovered that the keylogger is pre-installed on about 460 models of HP and Compaq laptop models. These include models from nearly every HP line.

Should You Feel Threatened?

The existence of keyloggers on hundreds of models of HP laptops does not appear to be the privacy nightmare that one might imagine. The keylogger is disabled by default. However, it can be switched on

by anyone with administrative privileges and who has local or remote access to the laptop. It needs to be enabled by editing the Windows registry, and it can be erased simply by updating Windows.

HP has worked with Synaptics to provide fixes for affected HP systems, and it has posted device-specific patches for most of its affected models to remove the keylogger. Microsoft has bundled these patches into its November 2017 update.

There are certain actions that you can take to minimize the chance that the keylogger will be used against you. Use a password manager so that you do not have to type passwords. That way they can't be sent to someone else. Also, use a firewall to block a keylogger from transmitting your data to another location.

How to Eliminate the Keylogger

HP has issued a software patch for its customers to remove the keylogger, and it has set up a support page to download this fix. Laptop owners should download HP's fix immediately. HP's support page can be accessed at https://support.hp.com/us-en/document/c05827409.

Summary

Given the fact that the keylogger is disabled by default, it probably hasn't been used against you. In addition, neither Synaptics nor HP has had access to your data as a result of this issue. If you keep up with Windows updates, as I do, Microsoft has already patched your system to fix this problem.

Interestingly, in May 2017, a similar keylogger was discovered in the audio drivers pre-installed on several HP laptop models. The company said that the keylogger code had been mistakenly added to the software

Acknowledgements

Information for this article was taken from the following sources:

Leftover Synaptics debugger puts a keylogger on HP laptops, *The Register*; December 11, 2017.
HP laptops found to have hidden keylogger, *BBC*; December 11, 2017.
Hundreds of HP Laptop Models Have Hidden Code That Can Record Your Keystrokes; *Fortune*; December 12, 2017.
How to Remove a Keylogger From Your HP Laptop, *Life Hacker*; December 13, 2017.
'Keylogger' Found on HP Laptops Not a Serious Threat, *Laptop Magazine*; December 14, 2017.