

Cyber spy campaign targets chemical industry: Symantec

October 31 2011

US Internet security firm Symantec on Monday exposed a cyber spying campaign targeting trade secrets at top chemical firms and linked the industrial espionage to a man in China.

At least 48 companies, including some that make advanced materials for [military vehicles](#), were targeted in a campaign Symantec dubbed "Nitro" given the type of information at risk.

"Attacks on the chemical industry are merely their latest attack wave," Symantec security response team members Eric Chien and Gavin O'Gorman said in a report released on Monday.

The attacks targeted NGOs supporting human rights from late April to early May before switching to the motor industry, according to the report.

Major chemical firms, mainly in the United States, Britain, and Bangladesh, came under fire by cyber [spies](#) from late July to mid September, Symantec said.

Nitro was aimed at stealing intellectual property for competitive advantage, according to Chien and O'Gorman.

Attackers researched firms, sending selected workers booby-trapped emails that, once opened, secretly infected computers with malicious "Poison Ivy" software designed to steal information.

While various ruses were used to trick workers into opening email attachments to unleash [spy software](#) in machines, a typical pretext was to fake a meeting invitation from an established business partner.

Another tactic used by cyber spies was to send employees email purporting to be a security software update that needed to be installed in computers, according to Symantec.

Poison Ivy code was written by a Chinese speaker and Nitro attacks were traced to a server located in the United States but owned by a "20-something male" in the Hebei region of China, the report said.

Symantec referred to the man internally as "Covert Grove" based on a literal translation of his name from Chinese to English.

China has repeatedly denied state involvement in cyber espionage against Western governments and companies, including well-publicized attacks on Internet giant Google that sparked a row between Washington and Beijing.

(c) 2011 AFP

Citation: Cyber spy campaign targets chemical industry: Symantec (2011, October 31) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-10-cyber-spy-campaign-chemical-industry.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.