

US spy agency holds contest to find young hackers (Update)

March 15 2013, by Kevin Begos

Bored with classes? One of the U.S. government's top spy agencies and Carnegie Mellon University want to interest students in a game of computer hacking.

Their goal with "Toaster Wars" is to cultivate the nation's next generation of cyber warriors in offensive and defensive strategies. The free, online "high school hacking competition" will run from April 26 to May 6.

The game is sponsored by the National Security Agency, which is responsible for code breaking and protecting the U.S. from cyberattack. NSA representative Vanee Vines said Friday that the U.S. increasingly needs professionals with highly technical cyber skills to help keep the country safe.

Last month, then-Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said cyber attacks are "the battlefield of the future," and security experts said massive amounts of data and corporate trade secrets, likely worth hundreds of millions of dollars, were being stolen from government and corporate computers.

News of the contest came just days after the Obama administration's national security adviser called for China to take "serious steps" to stop cyber theft and after a top officer at the U.S. Cyber Command warned that the federal government and the private sector need to be more aggressive in building the country's cyber defenses.

Organizers of the hacking competition say they hope participants will see computer security as a career choice.

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