

Confusion hits consumer market over US ban of Kaspersky

September 14 2017, by Joseph Pisani And Ryan Nakashima



This Monday, Jan. 30, 2017, file photo shows a sign above the headquarters of Kaspersky Lab in Moscow. Worries rippled through the consumer market for antivirus software after the U.S. government banned federal agencies from using Kaspersky Lab software on Wednesday, Sept. 13, 2017. Best Buy said it will no longer sell software made by the Russian company, although one security researcher said most consumers don't need to be alarmed. (AP Photo/Pavel Golovkin, File)

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after the U.S. government banned federal agencies from using Kaspersky Labs software on Wednesday. Best Buy and Office Depot said they will no longer sell software made by the Russian company, although one security researcher said most consumers don't need to be alarmed.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security cited concerns about possible ties between unnamed Kaspersky officials and the Kremlin and Russian intelligence services. The department also noted that Russian law might compel Kaspersky to assist the government in espionage.

Kaspersky has denied any unethical ties with Russia or any government. It said Wednesday that its products have been sold at Best Buy for a decade. Kaspersky software is widely used by consumers in both free and paid versions, raising the question of whether those users should follow the U.S. government's lead.

Nicholas Weaver, a computer security researcher at the University of California, Berkeley, called the U.S. government decision "prudent;" he had argued for such a step in July . But he added by email that "for most everybody else, the software is fine."

The biggest risk to U.S. government computers is if Moscow-based Kaspersky is subject to "government-mandated malicious update," Weaver wrote this summer.

Kaspersky products accounted for about 5.5 percent of anti-malware software products worldwide, according to research firm Statista.



In this Saturday, July 1, 2017, file photo, an employee of Kaspersky Lab works on computers at the company's headquarters in Moscow. Worries rippled through the consumer market for antivirus software after the U.S. government banned federal agencies from using Kaspersky Lab software on Wednesday, Sept. 13, 2017. Best Buy said it will no longer sell software made by the Russian company, although one security researcher said most consumers don't need to be alarmed. (AP Photo/Pavel Golovkin, File)

Another expert, though, suggested that consumers should also uninstall Kaspersky software to avoid any potential risks. Michael Sulmeyer, director of a cybersecurity program at Harvard, noted that antivirus software has deep access to one's computer and network.

"Voluntarily introducing this kind of Russian software in a geopolitical landscape where the U.S.-Russia relationship is not good at all, I think would be assuming too much risk," he said. "There are plenty of alternatives out there."

Sulmeyer also said retailers should follow Best Buy Co.'s lead and stop selling the software.

Office Depot Inc. announced Thursday that it will stop selling the software. Amazon, which also sells Kaspersky software, declined to comment. Staples, another seller of the software, didn't return a message seeking comment.



This Monday, May 22, 2017, file photo shows a Best Buy sign at a store in Hialeah, Fla. Best Buy said it will no longer sell software made by the Russian company Kaspersky Labs. (AP Photo/Alan Diaz, File)

Various U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies and several congressional committees are investigating Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential election.

Kaspersky said it is not subject to the Russian laws cited in the directive

and said information received by the company is protected in accordance with legal requirements and stringent industry standards, including encryption.

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