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Becky Dwyer
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Your ref: dwyerb010201@hotmail.com

Our ref: FOI/12/00518
May 2012

Dear Becky,

Thank you for your request of 2nd April 2012 submitted under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA). You asked for information regarding email blocking - specifically:

'...how widespread this problem is, and what areas it effects. My emails were regarding the topic of pornography, but what other topics are at risk for the same problem?

1. Over the past 5 years (since Jan 2007), how many emails were blocked?
2. How many of these blocked emails were legitimate emails, like mine?
3. What topics (in general) were these legitimate emails about?
4. How many complaints about blocked emails has the Scottish Executive received in the past 5 years?'

I can confirm that no emails to the Scottish Government are actually blocked, but some may be filtered and quarantined when the software believes that it has identified an email containing malicious software or potentially inappropriate content.

Before April 2011, any quarantined emails resulted in an automatic alert being sent to the intended recipient to let them know that an email had been quarantined, with information about the topic and sender. The intended recipient would then contact IT Support if they judged that the email contained legitimate business content and should be released to them.

From April 2011, the Scottish Government implemented a new feature to remind intended email recipients when they had quarantined emails, and to enable them to release these emails themselves.

In response to your specific questions:

1) Over the past 5 years (since Jan 2007), how many emails were blocked?

The information we hold covers the period from May 2008 – March 2012 (inclusive). The total number of recorded emails quarantined during that 4-year period was just under 26

million (25,987,251). To put this in perspective, Scottish Government receives approximately 2.1 million emails per week. That would equate over the above 4-year period, to around 6% of received emails being quarantined.

2) How many of these blocked emails were legitimate emails, like mine?

The Scottish Government holds no specific information on which quarantined emails are subsequently judged by the intended recipients to be 'legitimate' and released from quarantine. As noted previously, any intended recipient would be alerted that an email had been quarantined and would then be required to intervene manually to determine whether the content of the email was legitimate.

As part of a separate management information exercise, however, we did record during the 6-month period from 3rd Oct 2011 to 31st March 2012, that 939 emails quarantined in that period were subsequently released by recipients. Again, an alert would have been sent to the intended recipient inviting them to take action and it would fall to the recipient's judgement as to whether the email was a legitimate business one.

3) What topics (in general) were these legitimate emails about?

As per the previous responses, we hold no information relating to whether emails quarantined because of potentially inappropriate content are later judged to be legitimate business emails

4) How many complaints about blocked emails has the Scottish Executive received in the past 5 years?

We have no recorded complaints regarding blocked emails in the last 5 years.

If, for any reason, you are unhappy with this response to your request, you may ask us to carry out an internal review, by writing to the Director General Governance & Communities, R1 Spur, Saughton House, Broomhouse Drive, Edinburgh EH11 3XD (email: DGGC@scotland.gsi.gov.uk). Your request should explain why you wish a review to be carried out, and should be made within 40 working days of receipt of this letter. We will reply within 20 working days of receipt of such a request. If you are not satisfied with the result of any internal review then you subsequently have the right to make a formal complaint to the Scottish Information Commissioner.

Yours faithfully

Mark Collins

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