



Meltdown and Spectre – not the names of new James Bond villains!

I am not sure who gets to name software bugs or whether it operates like the naming of storms i.e. alphabetically, but however it works, Meltdown and Spectre, sound scary enough to warrant the urgent attention of every IT user, and rightly so!

What are they?

Meltdown and Spectre are serious security flaws that were found three weeks ago in central processing units (CPU's) of all processors designed by Intel, AMD and ARM since 1995. The flaws could let attackers steal sensitive data, including passwords, encryption keys, private information including banking details and will affect virtually every modern computer, including smartphones, tablets, PCs and Macs from all vendors and running almost any operating system.

What are the big boys doing?

Meltdown is the more serious flaw, whilst for Spectre it appears as if there is no easy fix yet. Intel's first round of Spectre CPU fixes caused more frequent, unwanted system reboots and other stability issues. They are currently testing new patches and advise users to wait until they are ready before installing them. So it might be worth remembering in the meantime, to get your updates from your PC, laptop, or motherboard maker, rather than Intel.

Fixes are already going out from Microsoft and Apple to help mitigate Meltdown and Spectre – though a full fix for these issues could still be some way off. However, the fixes are thought to slow down computer performance by as much as 30% on users of systems before Windows 10 and using 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th generation Intel processors. However you need them installed otherwise the alternatives don't bear thinking about. And browsers are getting in on the action too with Google, Firefox and Internet Explorer safeguarding their systems. Whilst Apple have pushed out updates to iOS 11 and macOS with security improvements to Safari.

What can you do?

The good news is that Spectre or Meltdown flaws have not yet been used in an attack, but that doesn't mean that it won't happen. In the meantime, we urge you to keep an eye out and follow our 1, 2, 3 action plan.

1. First and foremost don't panic.
2. Implement all available OS and firmware updates.
3. Keep your antivirus software vigilant.

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