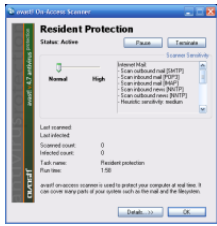


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By: Ionut Ilascu, Editor, Software Reviews



Avast, ye malware !!!

Enough with all the threatening

The biggest database on Earth is definitely the Internet. It contains so much information that you can find almost everything in here. The major drawback of the Internet is that you can download lots of viruses. And once you got your computer infected you'll have to put yourself through a lot of trouble to establish full functionality. Fortunately, the antivirus developers provide us with the necessary tools to reduce the infection risk. And you can elect the right software, depending on the type of malware you have on your machine. Choose between antivirus software, spyware eliminators, anti trojan programs, firewalls, etc. The only catch here is to elect the right tool. I always thought that it is best to prevent malware installing on your computer than to eliminate it. "avast! Antivirus" is an ALWIL Software product. The installation file will take about 11MB of the disk space. The version analyzed today (v.4.7.871) was released on August 8, 2006, so it is pretty "hot". The first "issue" of the software was released in 1988. The installation of the software is easy, all you have to do is press next until it completes. After the installation is complete the On-Access Scanner window will be displayed. In this window, the user can make the settings for four different modules: Internet Mail, Network Shield, Outlook Exchange and Web Shield. Internet Mail will provide protection for e-mails processed by other mail clients than MS Outlook and MS Exchange. Network Shield will protect your machine from worm attacks. Its role is similar to a firewall, but it does not replace it. With Outlook Exchange you can protect e-mail messages processed by MS Outlook mail client or MS Exchange only. Web Shield provides protection from viruses while browsing the Internet. If you download a corrupted file from a web page, avast! Web Shield will detect the virus during the download. These modules have customizing options that allow you to configure the sensitivity of avast!, web scanning, URL blocking, virus storing, POP, SMTP, IMAP, NNTP, etc. Opening the antivirus interface is possible by right-clicking the system tray icon. First, the software will perform a memory test after which the interface and the simple user interface help (can be closed whenever you want). The avast! Antivirus interface is very easy to use and provides almost all the options you need. You can choose between two skins: silver panel and szc-kde. I chose the second one as it looked a little less confusing. The first button (left lower corner) is for setting the sensitivity of the resident scanner (avast! Resident protection). There are three levels: disabled (resident scanner is stopped), standard (every executable, document and script is scanned at opening) and high (setting this level of protection will scan even the files that you are copying). The second button is for updating the virus database. The user can select between three levels of scanning (quick, standard and thorough). By choosing a quick scan, the software will check only the potentially dangerous files. At the opposite end is the thorough scan. If you want to also scan the archives (which I am sure that you do), just press where it says "Scan archive files" in the scanner sensitivity selection (a little blue "plus" sign should appear). The same button that enables the display of the scanner sensitivity, once pressed, will select all the files on the local disk to be verified. To customize the scan just press the Folder Selection button and select the drives, folders or files that you want to perform a scan on. The Settings menu is also skinnable and includes options like defining the maximum size of the chest (256MB is the default value) or the size of the file to be sent. The software is equipped with audio warnings which can also be disabled if the user considers them to be annoying. In Logging, the user can set the level (emergency, alert, critical error, warning, notice, info and debug). If you have some files on your computer that you do not want to be scanned, add them in the Exclusions submenu. Keep in mind that these files will not be subject to any scanning option, but they will be affected

by the resident protection. The user cannot schedule the scanning sessions, but can set the software to automatically update the virus database and the software. The interface contains a Help button in the right lower corner that assists you at every step while working with avast!. Press it and then click any button. A pop-up help balloon will appear, explaining what that button should be used for. **The Good** The software is freeware, so you do not have to pay for absolutely anything. The interface was a pleasant surprise for me as you can change the skin. If you open the virus database (in the Menu) you can see a list of all the viruses the software can find and terminate. You can also see the damage level and you also get some small pieces of advice. **The Bad** Whenever I run a scan on my computer I would like to have an estimation of the time the antivirus takes to verify my files. This version contains some options that cannot be accessed (they are not available for the free version), like Enhanced user interface. The Menu is accessible from a pretty uncomfortable point (top left corner), which is not in the usual visual range of the average user. **The Truth** The software seemed a little fragile at the beginning (I only saw the On-Access Scanner), but after entering the true scanning options, I realized that the application is extremely robust and the fact that it is free and has a very attractive interface makes it even more appealing. A major drawback is that the user cannot schedule the software to perform a scan at a certain time. All in all, the software provides great features and options. It has already reached a mature level of protection and is already competing with popular softwares, like Kaspersky or Norton. avast! Antivirus is great both for laptops and desktop computers as it does not require a great deal of memory. *Here are some snapshots of the application in action:*