ANTI-virus vendors won't be redundant any time soon with more than 200 new viruses being written each day, the AusCERT Asia Pacific IT Security Conference was told.

US security expert Bill Cheswick said the internet attack game "isn't going to end nicely - the best defence is to get out of the game".

But he warned that ordinary users would not be able to implement secure systems on their own. "People will never pick good passwords, two-factor authentication is essential," Mr Cheswick said. "And we will continue to lose the battle on user education.

"Most users are like my Dad; his Windows XP machine was like a software toxic waste dump. His security settings weren't turned on, he always clicked on pop-ups, he hadn't updated the patches. But he thought it was fine.

"What we need is a kind of 'Windows OK', a thin client implemented with Windows would be fine most home users," he said. "There should be nothing that you can click on in email or web pages that can hurt your computer. No functions that you don't use, no network services you don't need and no network listeners, shipped with default security settings turned on, and all the security controls in one location."

Mr Cheswick said Microsoft chief Bill Gates seems to have got the security message at last. But cleaning up Windows was like Hercules' task to clean the Augean stables, "where 3000 oxen had been kept for 30 years".

However Microsoft's upcoming Service Pack 2 for XP is expected to quickly boost network security when it is implemented.
Some 700 IT managers and security are attending the third annual AusCERT conference on the Gold Coast this week.

Karen Dearne is at AusCERT2004 as a guest of AusCERT