

Researcher at London event focuses on e-cig used for computer exploit

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(Tech Xplore)—E-cigarettes could be used to hack computers. They could not only serve as your stop-smoking tool but there is a possibility they could serve as an exploit platform as well.

But how? "With only minor modifications, the vape pen can be used by attackers to compromise the [computers](#) they are connected to - even if it seems just like they are charging," said Alexander Martin, technology reporter, with *Sky News*.

That's the word that caught the eye of several news sites recently, including *Geek.com* and *Infosecurity Magazine*, with Tara Seals reporting.

Martin said that security researcher Ross Bevington was at the BSides London gathering, where he talked about how an [e-cigarette](#) could be used to attack a computer.

The program notes said the title of his presentation was "Holy smokes, how to vape yourself to [root](#)." Bevington is a security researcher and consultant.

Launched in mid-2009, Security B-Sides is a

community-driven event built for and by info security community members.

"The volunteers for Security B-Sides London were inspired by the framework of the original Security B-Sides event in the USA, and have worked together to bring this to the [UK](#)."

Bevington, said Martin, showed how an e-cigarette could be used to attack a computer by fooling the computer to believe it was a keyboard or by tampering with its network traffic.

"Many e-cigarettes can be charged over USB," said Seals, "and Bevington said that takes just a few simple tweaks to the vaporizer to turn it into a weapon that can download malicious payloads from the web."

She quoted Adam Brown, manager of security solutions at Synopsys. "As Bevington's recent [research](#) shows, a vape pipe could easily be modified to work as any kind of peripheral device when plugged in, and so could be used in a similar way to either deliver a payload or perform some other malicious activity while plugged in," he said.

Stephanie Mlot in *Geek.com* said, "Most e-cigs include a rechargeable lithium-ion battery, which plugs into [a](#) cable or connects directly to the computer's USB port. And that's when they get you."

In the bigger picture, getting us is a security weapon that goes beyond vape pens to a range of devices in this ever-connected world. Cesare Garlanti, chief security strategist at prpl Foundation, said in *Infosecurity Magazine* that this is yet another piece of proof that "a connected-everything world presents staggering cybersecurity ramifications."

Over email, he told them that "Developers and manufacturers understandably are eager to get

their new high-tech devices to market, and unfortunately often overlook security."

There is some good news about the e-cigarette situation. First, e-cigs don't have that much memory, so complex code is a no-go, said Seals. An e-cigarette can only hold so much code. Also, many enterprises today block the use of USB ports, which would prevent an attack such as this.

The *Sky News* article, meanwhile, carried some advice from Bevington. Make sure the machine has updated its security patches. Have a good password. Lock your machine when you leave it. If running a business, obtain some kind of monitoring solution that can alert your [security](#) team if something like this attack occurs. Be wary if someone wants to plug something into your machine.

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