

SECURITY INSIGHTS:

How Fake “CAPTCHA” Prompts Can Let the Bad Guys In

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Imagine you're browsing the web and are asked to prove you're human by completing a small puzzle, one of those “CAPTCHA” tests. It feels fairly routine, as many companies adopt anti-bot technologies. Now picture ending up on a nearly identical page-but after solving the puzzle, you're tricked into installing something harmful.

In early 2024, researchers noticed an alarming trend called **ClearFake**, where hacked (WordPress) websites displayed fake pop-ups pretending to be browser update notifications. People were tricked into downloading malware called **Lumma stealer**, believing they needed to update their browser to keep using the internet.

Not long after, a more crafty version called **ClickFix** appeared. Instead of asking users to download something, ClickFix used fake CAPTCHA pages that looked legitimate and were easier to set up. These pages imitate common anti-bot messages but added a hidden twist: a “**verify**” button that silently copied a harmful command to the clipboard. Then, the prompt led users through seemingly innocent keyboard shortcuts that eventually guided them to run the command on their computer. In just a few seconds, the malware could steal their accounts, personal data, and passwords.

TAKEAWAYS:

- **Trust your gut.** If a site asks you to copy and paste something into a setting or prompt, stop and think twice-even if it claims to fix a problem
- **Stick with familiar sites.** Perform these checks only on websites you know and trust. Be cautious of unfamiliar ones that pop up suddenly-even if they seem legit
- **Avoid installing or pasting anything unexpected.** Especially when it claims to be a quick fix to a website issue.
- **Use a good security extension or tool.** Many tools now help block these clipboard tricks right in your browser

The danger is no longer flashy or obvious. It's the opposite-it's smooth, quiet, and relies on our willingness to help. But that's precisely what makes it powerful.
