Are You Protecting Your Organization Against E-Mail Misuse? A Benchmarking Study

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Objective:
The objective of this study was to determine best practices for e-mail policies and practices. The survey asked questions about whether policies existed, how they were done, and whether violations have been suffered, among other related questions.

Methods:
This survey was disseminated by the Society for Corporate Compliance and Ethics. The survey was a short, seven question survey with 59 total respondents. Forty-seven percent (47%) of respondents represented publicly held companies, 24% were from privately held companies, 10% were from non-profit organizations and the remaining 8% were from governmental entities.

Key Findings:
- Organizations use a variety of tools to attempt to control for the risks created by email, including written policies, certifications, training, auditing, and monitoring techniques
- The majority of respondents (60%) have experienced an incident of e-mail misuse
- Thirty percent (30%) of respondents said that employee e-mails have been used against the organization in litigation or investigations
- Written e-mail use policies are nearly universal (only one responding organization did not have one)
- Large proportions of organizations do not provide any training to employees on proper e-mail use (42%)
- E-mail use is often audited and monitored within the company, especially by monitoring software (41%) and periodic audits (29%)

Conclusion:
E-mail use among employees is a very efficient and effective way to communicate, but is often misused, possibly due to its informal nature. However, e-mail misuse among employees is a serious issue and is often used against organizations. Little training is given for its proper usage, which may contribute to the high proportions of organizations experiencing misuse issues.