

IN BRIEF

ID fraud clamp

SERIOUS identity fraud will incur jail sentences of up to 10 years under proposed NSW laws to clamp down on a billion-dollar industry. With criminals becoming more savvy at defrauding victims using new cyber technologies, the planned laws are likely to be introduced into NSW Parliament in late spring, NSW Attorney-General John Hatzistergos said. A 10-year jail sentence will apply for the most serious offences. Other penalties will apply to anyone found guilty of accessing other people's PINs, using their passwords or obtaining other information for the purpose of committing offences. The draft legislation will be open for public consultation until late August.

Paint seller charged

AN ART shop owner will face a Sydney court next month for selling spray paint to a teenager. After questioning three juveniles on Saturday, July 4, about offences at Wentworthville railway station, in Sydney's west, police say they found a box of spray paint and aerosol can nozzles. They asked the youths where the paint came from, which led them to interview the owner of an art shop in Wentworthville. A 24-year-old man has since been charged under graffiti control laws with selling paint to someone under 18. He will appear at Parramatta Local Court on August 19. Earlier this year a Sydney teenager was given a three-month jail term for writing a word of graffiti on a cafe. The sentence was later quashed.

Shooting link probe

POLICE have launched a major investigation to see if two fatal shootings in south-east Queensland are linked. Officers found the body of a man in the car park of Laidley Police Station after hearing a single gunshot about 8pm on Friday. The man had previously been seen near the police station carrying a rifle. He has not been formally identified. As the shooting happened on police property, the case is being treated as a death in custody, police said. The man's death was the second fatal shooting in the region on Friday, after the death of a 47-year-old man in inner-city Brisbane. Officers were called to an apartment block in Newstead about noon after reports of a shooting. Detective Inspector Wesley Biddle said a man was found with a gunshot wound. "We are investigating the matter as a homicide," Inspector Biddle said. The Nine Network reported the victim was an IT executive who lived in the Macquarie Street apartment building.



Clinical psychologist Dr Lee Ritterband said insomnia was a "silent epidemic" that affected up to a third of the population.

Photo: MELISSA ADAMS

Log on for some shut-eye

By DAVID CURRY

THE INTERNET keeps some people up late at night, but new research shows it might also be able to provide a way to help insomniacs get a good night's sleep.

An experiment at the University of Virginia using a web-based program called SHUTi (Sleep Healthy Using The internet) found that sleep for insomniacs improved significantly over nine weeks.

The overall level of insomnia severity for the insomniacs who used SHUTi fell to a level that was not "clinically significant", while the control group recorded almost no change.

Dr Lee Ritterband, speaking at the John Curtin School of Medical Research, said the subjects themselves recorded a marked improvement.

"At [the end of the experiment], we had a major improvement in perceived insomnia as well as actual insomnia," he said.

Six months after the experiment the subjects had retained most of the sleep improvement.

Dr Ritterband is an associate professor at the University of Virginia Health System and the director of the behavioral health and technology program area. He has degrees in clinical psychology and computer science/technology.

The SHUTi program is based on the cognitive behaviour therapy normally offered face-to-face by clinicians. It provides information, such as the need to avoid stimulants, large meals and alcohol before going to bed, and advice such as getting up when unable to sleep for more than 20 minutes and the need to develop rituals around going to bed.

The trial program uses questionnaires, sleep diaries, and other interactive ways of tailoring information for each insomniac.

"Internet interventions [mean] you don't have to go to the doctor, you can do it in your own time, you can do it in your home, and you don't have to have skilled care near you," Dr Ritterband said.

Medication, while a good short-term solution for insomnia, was not ideal for the longer term.

"[What happens is] tolerance builds up, so you take more medication. But tolerance builds up again, so you take more and more, and then you realise you're taking too much, so you stop," Dr Ritterband said.

"This causes withdrawal, and then you have all the consequences of rebound, so you go back on the medication."

Dr Ritterband said there was an

"epidemic of silent sufferers" of insomnia that affected about a third of the population.

In the United States, insomnia was estimated to cost \$41 billion annually in lost productivity.

It was also estimated to have contributed directly to 58,000 vehicle accidents.

Insomniacs were typically divided into those who had trouble going to sleep at night, those who woke in the middle of the night and struggled to get back to sleep, and those who woke too early.

Dr Ritterband said because the experiment only used a small sample of 45 subjects, more research using much larger samples would be required to confirm the effectiveness of the internet program.

This was likely to take several years, he said.

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