Parents take heed and students beware. The Internet can be a dangerous place. As a technology industry analyst, a retired police officer and president of the Canadian Information Processing Society (CIPS), Stephen Bhasari has seen first-hand both the opportunities and the equally present pitfalls today's technology presents.

"Technology is so pervasive it is embedded in almost everything kids today," he says. "When it is used properly, it can work wonders; when it is used illegally or improperly, it can affect lives for months, years, even." As children head back to school, Mr. Bhasari and the 4,000 members of CIPS are writing, speaking, creating blogs, issuing newsletters and taking advertising space in newspapers to get their message across. He, however, is knowledgeable; he is trying to change the threat in the threat of the message. When it comes to children and technology, CIPS sees itself in the role of defender against the threat of crossing guard. It wants children to be able to travel safely on the Internet highway.

"Our goal is, at its most fundamental level, to protect the public," says John Brufford, CIPS president and operator of e-Privacy Management Systems Inc. in Ottawa.

"As such, we are involved in all levels of IT. We have an enormous broad portfolio of interests and very ambitious goals. We have 26 chapters across Canada and all our members are dedicated to making IT safe, productive and as asset to all members of society." A broader portfolio, indeed, CIPS not only values and infers, it grants nationally recognized certifying, allowing government and helps develop standards for technology. Mr. Bhasari is one of the founders of CIPS, the only designation, the only designation.

"EVEN SEEMINGLY INNOCUOUS INFORMATION CAN COME BACK AND CREATE PROBLEMS"

recognized for IT professionals in Canada.

Mr. Bhasari also certifies not just institutions but teachers, students and even industry leaders. "One of our programs promotes women in IT," Mr. Bhasari says. "Others offer mentoring to young people interested in a career in technology. We grant scholarships, host career fairs and even go right into schools to talk about both. IT is a career but also the dangers some technology can present." Mr. Bhasari himself will be speaking at a Vancouver school this fall, an evening session that will allow local residents to attend, as well as students and parents.

The society is also active in both print and through blogs. Its bi-weekly newsletter, CIPS Connect, grows in popularity each month. Subscribers can sign up at www.cips.ca/news. There is also a popular blog where interested lay people can read the thoughts of and discuss experts such as Laura Chappell, who runs a digital identity program, and Graham Ross, founder of Bethany (http://blog.digitaltrust.com/ citizenmanagers).

As children head back to school, the need for public awareness of the potential dangers the Internet can pose due to the frontline of the issue CIPS has chosen to tackle. Mr. Brufford says, "It is not as muchvarchar; they have become a manageable issue;" he says. "The real danger comes from people who go to the Web unprotected or don't keep their protection up to date." They can become carriers and can infect anyone they contact through the various forms of IT, he says.

Buy, use and update software that protects against the messages of IT threats. They can be dangerous, even as many as yet unimagined. If there are two or more computers in a home, install a hardware or software firewall or adjustments to a third party.

"Today, almost all home computers will contain some form of confidential information such as financial or health or personal records," Mr. Brufford says. "Confidential information may be stored in personal records, IT professionals who are members of CIPS present a great measure of comfort and security to consumers."

One of the problems with the Internet is that Web sites may not be the way they seem and e-mails coming from organizations that may seem legitimate at first glance may, in fact, be false fronts designed to steal personal information such as passwords then be used in a myriad of ways. A call from a financial institution seeking personal information to renew an account or even from an e-bay may hide a digital threat.

"Remember that the Web is basically unregulated space, so it is up to organizations such as CIPS to make the public aware of the pitfalls," Mr. Bhasari says. "Technology teachers must teach all aspects of our lives and we are dedicated to making it safe and as simple as can be."