

How to Tell if Someone is Stealing Your WiFi

There are many reasons why you'd want to check if an unauthorized party is using your wireless network. A "WiFi Squatter" can slow down your connection and even cause security implications if they are using it for piracy or illegal activities. Are you experiencing a slower than normal bandwidth or intermittent losses of connection and can't figure out why? This could be a sign that someone is piggybacking off your wireless connection

The first and simplest thing you can do is check out your wireless network connection and see if it's secure. When you install your router, you're given the option of setting a wireless encryption protocol (WEP) key. Basically this is a password-protected method for you to log on to your own wireless network. If you don't have one, you're operating an open network.

Even if you have a WEP key, that doesn't necessarily mean your neighbor hasn't bypassed it. To determine if someone is logging onto your wireless network, you can do so by checking your wireless network log. The exact steps vary depending on your computer's operating system, but in general, if you look at your network and see more devices connected than you have allowed on your network, you have WiFi thieves. You can also check your router's DHCP client table. Much like viewing your network, your DHCP client table will list the machines on your network. If the number exceeds what you've set up, you have someone stealing your WiFi.

How can you protect yourself from this problem? In addition to a WEP key, you can use a security protocol such as WiFi protected access (WPA) which is somewhat more secure. You can also use manual DHCP assignment. To do this, set your router's DHCP to the manual setting and enter in each of your computer's physical addresses. This will restrict your network to allow only those computers recognized by the router. Finally, turn off your router's SSID broadcasting. This effectively makes your network invisible. It's much harder to steal WiFi from a network that doesn't appear on anyone's radar.