ORS Security Bulletin

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IN HUNTSVILLE

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From the Desk of Denise Spiller, Director Office of Research Security (ORS)

UAH, NASA partnership pushes nuclear thermal propulsion toward making deep space exploration a reality

JUN 01, 2026 | Russ Nelson

For decades, the challenge of deep space exploration has been less about where we want to go and more about how long it takes to get there. To meet those challenges, over 70 years ago researchers began experimenting with early nuclear propulsion systems as a means to power a future mission to Mars. Fast-forward to 2026, and The University of Alabama in Huntsville, a part of The University of Alabama System, has built a direct link to that long-ago era of invention and innovation to continue shaping the future of deep space exploration through nuclear thermal propulsion (NTP), a technology widely viewed as one of the most promising pathways for human beings to actually visit the wonders of our solar system.

NTP is a rocket propulsion method that uses a nuclear reactor as a heat source instead of chemical combustion. Inside the reactor, nuclear fission generates intense heat, which is used to superheat a lightweight propellant, usually hydrogen. That hot gas then expands and is expelled through a nozzle to produce thrust, pushing the spacecraft forward in much the same way a traditional rocket does. The key advantage is efficiency: nuclear heating can reach far higher temperatures than chemical rockets, allowing more thrust per unit of propellant, potentially drastically cutting travel times to destinations like Mars.

To read the full article: UAH, NASA partnership pushes nuclear thermal propulsion toward making deep space exploration a reality

The Security Clearance Risks of AI Companions and Chatbots

John Berry | May 24, 2026

Artificial intelligence tools have become part of everyday life. From AI chatbots that assist with work tasks to AI “companions” designed for personal conversations and emotional support, these systems are increasingly sophisticated and increasingly common. You only have to look at some recent movies like “Her” or “The Creator” to understand how AI issues may eventually create security concerns.

For security clearance holders and applicants these technologies raise a number of important security concerns that are often overlooked. It has caused me to reconsider how these issues could potentially affect my clients.

After 27 years of representing security clearance holders and applicants, I have seen how emerging technologies frequently outpace public understanding of the security risks involved. AI companions and chatbot platforms present unique issues involving privacy, disclosure, judgment, foreign influence, and handling of sensitive information.

THE PRIVACY AND DATA COLLECTION PROBLEM

Many AI chatbot and companion platforms collect extensive user data, including:

- Personal conversations
- Behavioral information
- Location and device data
- Preferences and emotional interactions

In some cases, users disclose highly personal or sensitive information without fully understanding how the data is stored, processed, or shared. It can be easy to ask questions or provide very personal information to these platforms and assume it stays with the chatbot or companion.

To read the full article: The Security Clearance Risks of AI Companions and Chatbots

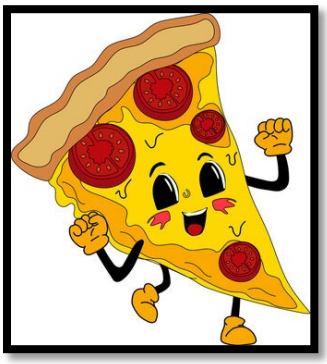
2026 Annual Security Refresher Training

For admission to training events, you must RSVP (using your UAH email account) at the link below which corresponds to your chosen date of attendance.

- **Location:** Bob Jones Auditorium on Redstone Arsenal - 5303 Martin Rd SW, Huntsville, AL 35808 Time: 1:00-1:30 Sign-In and Pizza, 1:30-2:30 Training
  - Tuesday, June 16th
  - Thursday, July 16th
- **Location:** UAH OKT S105
  - Thursday, June 25th

Keep in Mind – One of the requirements to maintain your PCL is to complete Annual Refresher Training. Per the 32 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 117.12(k), contractors will provide all cleared employees with security education and training every 12 months. Refresher training will reinforce the information provided during the initial security briefing, keep cleared employees informed of changes in security regulations, and address issues or concerns identified during contractor self-reviews.

All cleared employees will need to attend an in-person session if they are local to the Huntsville area and within a 2-hour drive.



Please remember to report any suspicious contacts or activity to ORS.

Stay aware and stay safe!

KNOW YOUR SECURITY TEAM!

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