

Backup – Emergency Preparedness

Anyone who has had me service their computer has heard, I'll admit, and I'm sure, about the importance of backing up.

Let me relay a story: One of the first calls I had as a computer technician was from a gentleman in his 40's who had tragically lost his wife several days earlier. He wanted to create a slideshow for the funeral and his computer wasn't working, so he called me. His lifelong collection of pictures, mostly of his wife, lived on this one computer only. The diagnosis was water damage; it turns out his washing machine was leaking towards the area on the floor where the computer sat. Using some sophisticated data recovery techniques, I was able to retrieve about 80% of his pictures. Actually, that was better results than I had expected due to prolonged exposure to water. I will never forget the tears of joy and sadness that streamed down this man's face after I showed him his recovered pictures.

This story taught me a lesson that I try to pass on whenever I can. Backup, backup, backup! Let me be clear: all computers fail at some point. Electronic hardware has a finite lifetime and, let's face it – Windows has been known to cause some, ahem, instability issues. Other things which we never consider, but should, include: fire, theft and natural disaster.

Think about your computer; what would you lose if it suddenly disappeared? Anything critical? If you just gasped, you need to backup now!

There are several backup strategies, and you'll have to determine which one is right for you. But please, pick something! The simplest approach is manually copying and pasting your data to a removable device, like an external hard drive, a CD or DVD or a flash drive. Most email programs allow you to 'export' your email information, which you can do to your removable device. There are automated backup programs as well as programs that take an 'image' of your computer, however these become more advanced to configure and monitor. Typically people care the most about their documents (pictures, music etc.), their email address books, program data (like a tax file in Quicktax) and their favorites.

One other factor to consider is the physical location of your backup. I have seen cases where people diligently backup to their removable device, which stays plugged into the machine. Theft, fire, or natural disaster eliminate both the original and the backup in one fell swoop. So unplug your backup device and move it; to your garage, to your safe-deposit box, to your neighbor's, to the other end of the house – preferably in some location other than where the originals live.

Be safe, backup and may your important information live long and prosper!