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Home Personal Computer (PC) Maintenance for Windows Operating Systems

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Why do I need to maintain my home PC?

As with most types of equipment, you must perform periodic maintenance on your home PC to keep it in good operating condition. Performing maintenance will help your PC run faster, use resources more efficiently, and could save you from headaches caused by system failures and degradation. Most importantly, proper PC maintenance is crucial in order to protect your machine from security threats such as worms, viruses and other malicious activity.

How do I keep my home PC maintained?

Note: The following steps are provided to help ensure that your home PC operates effectively and securely. Most of the tips can be performed with moderate knowledge of PCs and can generally be completed in a short time. More detailed, in-depth assistance may be required in some instances, in which case you may wish to consult a qualified computer repair professional.

- ***Establish and maintain a plan. Make a plan to perform periodic maintenance and put it on your calendar as a reminder. Back up critical files system files and programs before beginning.***

- ***Set a System Restore Point.*** Before you begin your periodic maintenance or make any significant changes, set up a system restore point, which will enable recovery from any error that may occur during maintenance. To set a System Restore Point, click Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, System Restore, Create a Restore Point. (For "Classic" Start Menu: click Start, Programs, Accessories, System Tools, System Restore, Create a Restore Point.)

- ***Remove unnecessary files or programs.*** Empty your Recycle Bin and delete Windows temporary files. Remove installed programs that you no longer use. The Disk Cleanup program does all of these tasks including the deletion of unneeded Windows components. To access the Windows Disk Cleanup program, click: Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Disk Cleanup. (For "Classic" Start Menu, click: Start, Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Disk Cleanup.)

In Internet Explorer, clear your history, temporary Internet files, and cookies by clicking on Tools, Internet Options and select the tab labeled "General." Click on the Delete button under the section

labeled “Browsing history.”

Finally, archive or delete old files such as documents, images and graphics that are no longer needed.

- ***Optimize system performance.*** Configuring your PC software to operate as efficiently as possible will help your PC run faster and smoother. Organize your data files in a central folder with appropriate subfolders (do not save files in the root directory or on the desktop). This makes backup easier and can reduce fragmentation on your hard drive.

- ***Run a defragment tool on your disk drive.*** To do so, click Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Disk Defragmenter. (For “Classic” Start Menu, click Start, Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Disk Defragmenter.)

- ***Apply updates and patches***. Make sure your operating system and software applications have the latest updates installed—and that the auto-update feature is enabled. Ensure that your anti-virus/anti-spyware/anti-adware software are running and receiving automatic updates. Check vendor and manufacturer websites for device drivers updates, and apply patches as needed. Renew all maintenance contracts/subscriptions.

- ***Perform regular backups.*** All critical files, as well as any information not easily replaced should be backed up. Check backup functions to ensure they are operating properly. Back up your files to a remote location (external hard drive or PC).

- ***Check your firewall***. Review firewall settings for product configurations. Confirm that settings are appropriate for the current level of security needed.

- ***Routinely change your passwords.*** Routinely change all of your passwords for local applications, as well as those used for websites. Use strong passwords with at least eight characters and incorporate a mix of numbers, special characters, and upper and lower case letters.

- ***Perform hardware inspections.*** Perform a visual check of your PC hardware to prevent potential problems before they occur. This includes examining your surge suppressor, UPS, power strip, and cables for any damage. Replace batteries as needed.

Additional Information:

- **Multi-State Information Sharing and Analysis Center Cyber Security Tips Newsletter - http://www.msisac.org/awareness/news/2008-03.cfm**

- **Small Business Computing -** http://www.smallbusinesscomputing.com/testdrive/article.php/3864116/7-Basic-Windows-PC-Maintenance-Tips.htm

- **Tips4PC -** http://www.tips4pc.com/articles/computer%20maintenance/computer_maintenance_checklis_tips.htm

- **Sensible-Computer-Help -** http://www.sensible-computer-help.com/computer-maintenance-tips.html

- **Microsoft -** http://www.microsoft.com/athome/setup/maintenance.aspx

For more monthly cyber security newsletter tips visit: www.msisac.org/awareness/news/

The information provided in the Monthly Security Tips Newsletters is intended to increase the security awareness of an organization's end users and to help them behave in a more secure manner within their work environment. While the tips may relate to maintaining a home computer, the increased awareness is intended to help improve the organization's overall cyber security posture. Organizations have permission--and in fact are encouraged--to brand and redistribute this newsletter in whole for educational, noncommercial purposes.

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