

Caring For Your Computer

Most computer users receive some sort of training on their use, either formally or informally. However, most users are never given appropriate training on an essential task that can increase the life of a computer and help prevent damage: caring for a computer. Computers, like any other piece of electronic equipment, need special care and attention in order to perform properly and safely. There are several specialized tasks such as defragmenting, scanning and reformatting that computer experts can do to keep the internal system of a computer working well. However, we'll leave these tasks to the experts for now and concentrate on some daily do's and don'ts that any computer user should know.

A Clean Machine

This may seem like a simple topic, but computers require special cleaning even on the outside. Keeping your system free of dust, dirt and liquids is the first step to computer care. Your system's user guide is the best place to find information on how to clean your outer components; but here are some general tips that you should always remember:

- **Never** spray your monitor screen (or any other computer component) with glass cleaner. Instead, spray a lint-free cloth *lightly* with glass cleaner, then clean the screen. Be sure to hold the cloth away from the computer when spraying and disconnect all connections prior to cleaning.
- Computer components should be kept as dust-free as possible.
- Canned air or small computer-specific vacuum cleaners are an excellent way to clean keyboards, computer case vents, or around disk drive openings. **Never** use a household vacuum cleaner or liquid.
- The rubber ball inside the bottom of a mouse may need occasional cleaning. If the mouse does not perform correctly, check your user guide for cleaning directions.
- **Never** try to remove the cover on your computer to clean inside. Instead, take it to an authorized service technician for cleaning.
- Keep all liquids and food items away from your computer. Liquids and food crumbs can damage delicate electronic circuits. Also, mixing liquids and electronic components can cause serious electrical shock! If a liquid accidentally spills onto your computer or peripheral connected to your computer, **immediately** turn it off, physically disconnect all power sources (including laptop battery), and contact an authorized service technician.
- Wash your hands before using the computer to avoid "sticky keys."
- When in doubt about how to clean your computer system, consult your user manual or technical support.

Environment Protection (Laptops)

Laptops are specifically made to be portable, but that doesn't mean they should be used or stored just anywhere. There are many environmental variables that can damage a laptop, without even being turned on!

- **Never** store or use your computer in an environment that you would not be comfortable in. This includes cold or hot temperatures, rain, snow, dust, etc. Turning on a laptop after exposing it to an extreme change in temperature is similar to placing extremely hot glass into ice water. Can you hear the cracking and shattering? Make sure to never leave your laptop in your car for an extended period of time. If your laptop is accidentally left in extreme hot or cold temperature, be sure to allow ample time for the laptop to adjust to room temperature before powering it on again.
- Avoid magnetic devices such as stereo speakers and metal detectors. Hard drives, floppy disks, and memory (including flash memory) all store data magnetically. Exposing a laptop to a magnet can potentially wipe the data from your laptop or flash drive, even if powered off!
- Laptops should be stored in bags specifically made for laptops when traveling. Much more so than desktop computers, laptops are susceptible to damage from small bumps and impacts. While being gentle at all times will help, a laptop bag will help to prevent damage.
- Never store anything on top, below or immediately next to a laptop. Placing items on top of your laptop can damage the display requiring a very expensive repair not covered by most warranties. Also, quite a few laptops "breathe" through vents and fans located on the bottom or side of the laptop. By setting a laptop on top of a phone book or anything other than a desk or laptop appropriate stand, the laptop is essentially being strangled and can overheat, damaging vital internal components.

A Shocking Possibility

It is important to remember that your computer is connected to electricity. If you have an Internet connection, that also means that your computer is connected to a telephone line or cable connection. These are also conductive connections. That means that lightning could be conducted to your computer through any of these connections. For safety reasons, you should never use your computer during a storm.

Many computer users purchase **surge protectors** to safeguard their system. The user plugs computer components into the surge protector, then plugs the surge protector into the wall. Just like the name implies, surge protectors are designed to protect computers against electrical surges or lightning. However, these devices can fail. So, it's best to stay clear of the computer during storms. Also, as mentioned earlier, electricity and liquids don't mix. Keep

water and other liquids away from the computer system. This includes drinks, water guns, fish bowls and cleaning fluids.

About Desktop Resources, Inc.

Desktop Resources, Inc. was founded in 1995 by Tony Schafer, and is a leader in helping organizations couple their business initiatives with the technology to address those needs. DRI's "InformIT" managed services offerings proactively manage client infrastructure and strive to prevent problems before they occur. For more details, contact DRI at (317) 596-3650 or <http://www.DesktopResources.com>