

Watch that Surge

I unfortunately sometimes have the dismal task of informing people that their computer had been hit by a fatal power surge. The general response is disbelief and denial that the damage was caused by a lightning strike as they explain that there have been no thunderstorms lately. I take a deep breath and begin the long explanation of how power surges and brown outs affect computer systems. Some of my best advice is in this article, and if you spend \$25 today you could possibly save hundreds of dollars tomorrow.

Power surges can come from a number of different places. Sure, thunderstorms are probably the number one troublemaker, but an electrical surge can easily come from other sources as well. Your heat pump coming on or a car hitting a power pole down the street can produce the same effect of a lightning strike. Because of this, simply unplugging your computer during a thunderstorm is never enough to protect your computer. In fact computers are so much more sensitive than other electronic devices that I would not plug one into the wall without a surge protector.

Don't skip over the next couple of paragraphs; in fact these are the most important paragraphs for those of you to read who think your system is already safe from power surges. First question, when did you purchase your surge protector? If you can't remember, chances are it's time to take a trip to the store. Most surge protectors wear out after three or four years of use. A surge protector's duty is to absorb electrical surges so that your computer doesn't take the hit. As time goes by it is inevitable that the surge protector will absorb one electrical surge too many and will stop functioning properly. Most surge protectors won't warn you that they are no longer working so the best thing to do is stay safe and buy a new surge protector every three years.

When you buy that new surge protector be sure to purchase one with phone/modem protection. Be sure to check that your phone line plugs into the surge protector before it plugs into the wall. When computers are damaged because of actual thunderstorms, the damaging blow generally comes through the phone line. Computer modems are very sensitive to power fluctuations and phone lines are generally not as well grounded as power lines. If you try to log onto your Internet service and you get a message that says "No Dial Tone" then you normally have to replace the modem card in your system.

When you purchase your new surge protector be sure to not skimp on quality. You will need to spend about \$25 to get a good quality surge protector. I generally recommend buying a surge protector that will protect your system from up to at least 1000 joules and have a clamping voltage of at least 330 volts. The higher the joule rating and the lower the clamping voltage the better the surge protector will perform.

This article can easily save you hundreds of dollars in repair costs, if in doubt, error on the side of caution and purchase a new surge protector. Damage by surges is preventable with a little vigilance on your part. If you need technical help with your computer be sure to contact the best support staff in Knoxville. Call Thomas, Roger, or Justin at the Computer Depot, 947-0749.