

Protecting equipment from power outages

Modern electronics can handle lots of work, but caution is still necessary

Char from Wadsworth asks "Should I turn my computer off at night?" I add the question... "How to I protect my computer and sensitive electronic equipment from lightning strikes?"
The answer is maybe!

In support of leaving it on:

The initial start of the computer is a shocking experience. Electronics these days can handle running 24x7x365. Convenience; avoid the hassle of booting up.

In support of turning it off:

Avoid wasting any electricity. Maybe the startup consumption negates the savings if there is not enough down time between shut down and re-start up. Security – if the computer isn't on, it can not be hacked. Windows can always use a break.

The discussion following might give some reasons.

In the past few weeks, our area of Ohio has experienced some powerful storms.

Nancy had lightening blast her backyard. It blew dirt high into the trees, sending high voltage through the house blowing up electronics... computers, printers, monitors, televisions, microwave, and even the range hood! Stacci had lightning come in through her phone lines to her DSL modem which melted the CAT5 cable connecting the modem to her firewall destroying lots of sensitive equipment. There are many more stories.

Are you prepared for this kind of experience? Some education: What classifies as sensitive electronics? They are devices that use electronic circuit boards. This list includes modern washing machines and dryers, modern sewing and embroidery machines, most microwave ovens, stereo and television equipment, and computer equipment.

There are four problems with power for sensitive electronics. A spike or surge is when we have too much voltage. A sag is when we have too little voltage. Black outs cause lots of problems because the power does not generally just drop off, it blinks. This sends voltage surges and sags up and down the power lines. Line noise slowly destroys sensitive electronics.

There is a great deal of information available on this subject. Please check out http://www.apc.com/power/power_event.cfm.

Nancy had her computer hit even though it was physically unplugged from the AC power! The zap came in via the modem.

I strongly recommend power protection equipment for all sensitive electronic equipment. For your most sensitive equipment, choose devices which protect against all four (4) power problems. Be careful when selecting this equipment... some brands and models do not function well. If properly protected, your equipment can remain plugged in and used during storms.

If you do not have your equipment protected properly, unplug your sensitive electronic equipment completely from every device attached to the wall when you are not using it. This includes power cables, phone cables and cable television cables. This is especially important when stormy weather occurs.

Please backup your important data files. Ask yourself, "What would I do if all of my digital pictures were suddenly gone?"

Let's talk about data backup next week. Do you have a story about power? Do you have a question? Please address your questions, comments and suggestions to questions@compusurgeon.com.