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Tips to protect your computer from spring storms

As we begin the spring season, storms present the very real possibility of severe damage to computers and the loss of valuable data stored on them.

According to the National Lightning Safety Institute, lightning strikes result in nearly \$2 billion in computer damages and data loss each year. To minimize the chances of becoming a part of that statistic, computer users should take some basic precautions to ensure equipment and data stay safe.

"Every computer needs adequate protection against minor spikes in electricity such as those that occur with rain or wind," said Nick VanSlyck, who repairs and replaces modems for customers of Socket, a Missouri-based telephone and Internet provider. "A surge protector can help shield a computer from these normal power fluctuations."

When choosing a surge protector, buyers should be sure they are not mistakenly purchasing a power strip, which simply provides extra outlets. A surge protector has its limitations and cannot always protect against major power fluctuations, such as those that occur with lightning and strong storms.

Because a surge protector does not offer complete protection against storm damage, VanSlyck suggests unplugging computers if a storm is forecasted. Doing so will not only protect valuable equipment from damage, but it will help protect against data loss as well.

Be sure the computer is turned off before disconnecting the power supply. Then unplug

peripheral equipment (printer, scanner, high-speed modem, etc.) from the electrical outlet. It is not necessary to disconnect this equipment from the computer.

If an Internet connection is being used through the telephone line (such as DSL or dial-up), that equipment should also be disconnected from the jack because the majority of power surges travel through telephone lines.

If computer equipment was not unplugged before a power outage, it is best to do so before the power comes back on. This will prevent damage that might occur with inconsistent power flow when electricity is restored.

Finally, when the storm has ended, turn the computer back on. Do not reconnect and turn on peripheral equipment until the computer is on. This will prevent damage due to power spikes that can occur as the computer powers up.

"Above all, computer users should exercise caution and common sense when preparing for spring storms," said VanSlyck. "By doing so, the chances of suffering damages will be greatly minimized."

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