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## Disaster Planning: Documents



After a thunderstorm hits your powerline, or after any other generic disaster/theft/ransomware event, there's a process of rebuilding. Take inventory, replace hardware, restore from backup, import from the cloud, and so on. Some of these things take more time than others. Planning for recovery makes recovery considerably faster. While backups can handle most recovery work, copying software to new hardware mostly requires new setups, and notes from the old setups.

If trouble hits, any computer file that you would need quickly should be in the form of a document, and not stashed in a database. What's the difference? A document is something that you see in a folder, double-click it, and it opens, usually in **your choice** of program. A .DOCX file can open in Microsoft Word or in Libre Office. A PDF can open in Adobe Reader or Microsoft Edge. Same for spreadsheets, either .XLSX for Excel or .ODS for LibreOffice. A document stands alone, and can be opened in multiple programs.

A database, generally, opens in a specific program, and if you were to think of it in physical terms, it would not be a page, but either one or several stacks of index cards, holding related

data: Customers, invoices, products, inventory, and so on. You run the program, not double-click the file, and it opens up your custom application. Outlook and Thunderbird are mail databases. QuickBooks is an accounting database. And each office has their own vertical app (industry-specific software) that tracks whatever they do or sell; these are generally database programs.

During disaster recovery, documents can be read immediately after they're restored, mostly without configuring special software. Databases, however, require re-setup, and in some cases, a lot of configuration steps. Those industry-specific programs are often particularly detailed to set up and require appointments with remote tech support, and that can't be scheduled until **after** computers are running and the internet has been restored. The most-common disasters I deal with are lightning strikes, and they destroy cable modems, which are rarely grounded correctly at the utility pole, so internet can be down for a day or two. The result is that databases are usually the last part of a recovery.

So key information should be saved to documents. "It's in my client management software from a few years back, I have to search by vendor for it" means, to me, that the information needed to re-install isn't available until after it's installed. Oops. So that adds a day to the rebuild.

What should be saved as documents, then? In the approximate order you'll need them:

- Your tech's phone number. (410-871-2877)
- Employee contact information.
- Your internet provider's phone number, your account number there, and whatever they use to confirm who you are each time you call.
- Where the backup drives are located. Yes, write that down; just in case you aren't available.
- Network and computer configuration notes.
- Software installation information, including license keys.

Most of these documents should be copied to off-site storage as well. Phones are a possibility, but Google Drive is better. And yes, you need to remember that one password without looking in a database.

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## Windows 10 "1903", Coming Soon

Sometime soon, Microsoft will release version 1903 of Windows 10, named for the year and month. As usual, these semi-annual feature updates take 1-2 hours to install, and you can check which version you have by clicking Start (the Windows button), typing 'winver' and pressing Enter. Most of you are running versions 1809 and 1803 right now.

There will be new features in 1903. As usual, more items will move from Control Panel to the Settings app, and there are new options:

Light mode for the Windows task bar and system tray.

Dark mode for Windows Explorer.

Cortana (voice commands and virtual assistant) will now be separate from the Windows search feature on the task bar. Cortana has her own new O icon on the task bar.



*This is Windows 10 with light mode turned on for the task bar, and dark mode for Windows Explorer, and the new Cortana "O" icon.*

**Change Active Hours:** Also in Settings, 'change active hours' has always been in Windows 10, and allows you to choose when updates should not attempt to install. What's new is that there is an option in 1903 to 'automatically adjust active hours for this device based on activity'.

**Focus Assist:** A new option in Settings can silence most or all notifications (those bottom-right slide-in annoyances), by time of day, or by level of importance. Finally, for those who use their notebooks to run slideshows, there's an option to turn off notifications "when I'm duplicating my display" so as not to tell the world you have an email arriving about an appointment that shouldn't be public.

**Microphone:** A new microphone icon shows up on the task bar while the microphone is in use.

**Mouse pointer:** The size of the mouse pointer can be adjusted in settings. The cursor (or insertion icon) can also be made wider.

**Sandbox:** Only for computers with virtualization support in the processor, and turned on in the hardware settings, there is a sandbox to run programs in isolation. What happens in the Sandbox, just goes away when closing the Sandbox. Not for everyone, but useful for testing setup programs for software developers, and checking that a new program is safe. Sandbox has to be turned on in the Windows Features list before use, and is available in Pro versions of Windows.

**More Apps** shipped as part of Windows can be removed from Settings. As some of these apps are online games or "web pages in a box" such as News, Sports, and Movies, removing the apps you don't use is worthwhile, as these apps update often and crash during updates, often, so the usual rule applies: Remove unused software.

Once you have 1903, everyone should try out Focus Assist. Anyone using Windows on a television, a 4K monitor, or a very small laptop, should try out the new mouse pointer settings.

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