

NOW IS THE SEASON TO DO A HOUSECLEANING OF YOUR COMPUTER'S OPERATING SYSTEM AND OTHER SOFTWARE

Beginners' Kaffee Klatch
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Routine preventative maintenance can spell the difference between a reliable computer system and one that is prone to irritating and hard-to-diagnose problems. Just as tuning up your engine, rotating the tires, and changing the oil are necessary aspects of car ownership, so are the operating system tasks that will be covered during this presentation. Some of these tasks will take some of your time and patience, but you'll be glad that you completed them in the long run.

Assist Your Computer in Keeping Your Registry Tidy

CAUTION: Beginners and Near Beginners should not venture into the Registry! However, the paragraph below provides some advice for how you may assist in keeping your Registry free of obsolete files.

An untidy, bloated Windows Registry can lead to performance and stability problems over time, particularly if you install and uninstall programs and utilities on a regular basis. All Registry actions occur behind the scenes and, consequently, you have very little control over what takes place there. Most programs and many system utilities store data in the Registry, and Windows XP does its best to properly manage the data. However, if you remove programs by simply deleting the program folder, you'll often leave behind Registry information that is obsolete.

You can help Windows XP and the Registry by always uninstalling programs properly.

1. First, see if there is an uninstall utility associated with the program in the **Start** menu **All Program's** folder. If you find one, use it to uninstall the program.
2. If the program that you wish to uninstall has no such utility, then use Microsoft's generic Add or Remove Programs applet in the Control Panel (Start | Control Panel | Add or Remove Programs). These processes will help keep the Registry free of useless data.

Here are three of the best FREE Registry Cleaner products.

RegScrubXP is a very popular utility designed to delete unnecessary information from the System Registry of Windows 2000 & XP operating systems. This "junk" is often left behind when programs are uninstalled, and the information is not needed anymore. Programmers mistakenly load the Registry with junk as well. The result of cleaning out the junk is a smaller, faster Registry. Your operating system accesses the Registry a lot, so keeping it clean is a good idea!

RegScrubXP also helps you tweak your Registry to provide a more pleasant computer experience.
<http://tinyurl.com/cz4ed>

Tweak Now Registry Cleaner: Deletes obsolete files from your registry.
<http://tinyurl.com/8e9xu>

EasyCleaner went through some growing pains a few years ago, but has matured nicely into a small suite of system-maintenance tools that works well.
<http://tinyurl.com/2dg5d>

This registry cleaner is probably the best commercial product available. Only \$12.95!

Internationally renown guru Fred Langa recommends an outstanding full version registry cleaner program that offers a 30-day trial. In thirty days, you can put it through its paces before you decide whether or not you want to keep it. One-time program cost? Only \$12.95! It's practically free. Langa never recommends a product unless he has fully tested it. This may be the best \$12.95 you will ever spend for a computer application! The program is listed below. It's called RegSupreme, a stand alone component of JV16 Power Tools.

JV16 PowerTools: The current version of JV16 PowerTools is available in several flavors, all of which may be downloaded as uncrippled, fully functional 30-day trial versions. You pay if you decide to keep the software beyond the trial period. The registry cleaner component of PowerTools is available in standalone form: RegSupreme (\$12.95) and RegSupreme Pro (\$16.95). The PowerTools Registry cleaner has two settings -- regular and aggressive, to help prevent over-cleaning -- and also categorizes the problems it detects so you can help see and separate the serious problems from those that are less so. The "aggressive" setting will dig far deeper into your Registry. This Registry Cleaner, by default, only shows you Registry items that should be safe to remove; and lets you examine each reported problem item one by one, if you wish, to help you be sure that any changes you make will be positive ones. However, the tool also requires that you make a backup of all items you remove so you can easily restore any Registry settings you delete in error
<http://www.jv16.org/>

Clean Your Desktop of Unused Shortcuts

Microsoft's Desktop Cleanup Wizard (available only in Windows XP) helps you keep your desktop free of the shortcuts that you do not use. The Desktop Cleanup Wizard periodically checks the desktop for unused shortcuts (anything not used in the last 60 days) and provides an easy way to remove those shortcuts without harming the installed program.

This feature is configured to run automatically every 60 days. If you want to access this feature:

1. Right-click any blank area of the Desktop.
2. Click on **Properties**.
3. Click on the **Desktop tab**.
4. Click on **Customize Desktop**.
5. Click **Desktop Cleanup**.

When the **Desktop Cleanup Wizard** runs, it places unused shortcuts into a folder on the desktop called Unused Desktop Shortcuts. The **Desktop Cleanup Wizard** displays a list of the desktop icons that have not been used for 60 days or more, enabling you to remove those icons that you don't want on your desktop. You can retrieve icons you have removed by opening the Unused Desktop Shortcuts folder on your desktop.

Clear the **Run Desktop Cleanup Wizard every 60 days check box** if you don't want the wizard to run automatically every two months.

In all versions of Windows, you can remove an individual desktop icon by right-clicking the icon and then selecting Delete.

To add or remove the file folder icons for My Documents, My Computer, My Network Places, or Internet Explorer, select or clear those items under Desktop icons by following these steps:

1. Right-click on any open area on your **Desktop**.
2. Click on **Properties**.
3. Click on the **Desktop Tab**.
4. Click on **Customize Desktop**.
5. Select/deselect the **Desktop Icons** of your choice.

Clean Up the Old “Stuff” on Your Hard Drive

If you want to clean up your hard drive, the question becomes “What files are okay to remove without causing any trouble?”

Remove Old Programs

For starters, get rid of those programs that you no longer use. Click on **Start** and then **All Programs**, and look for no-longer-used programs listed there. For example, if you are no longer using Norton AntiVirus, look for a file folder called Norton AntiVirus. Within the folder should be an uninstall feature. If any program that you wish to remove from your computer has its own uninstall feature, it is best to use it. Otherwise, use the generic Add/Remove Programs feature built in to each version of the Windows operating system.

To access the Windows' Program removal feature, Go to **Start>Control Panel>Add/Remove Programs**. You'll see a listing of programs installed on your PC. When you find a program you no longer use, select it and click Change/Remove.

Remove Old Internet Files

Next, get rid of files that have accumulated as you have used the Internet. In Internet Explorer browser, select **Tools>Internet Options**. On the **General tab**, click the **Delete Files** and **Clear History** buttons.

Use Windows' Maintenance Tools

Windows includes a handful of simple applets necessary to do all the basic maintenance chores. Run these programs once in a while and you just might avoid bigger troubles down the road.

Windows XP includes utilities such as **Chkdsk**, **Disk Cleanup**, and **Defrag**. These tools clean up files, check hardware status, and help you maximize your system's performance.

Chkdsk (Windows XP only).

Your hard drive stores information in sectors on platters that spin at a very high speed. Over time, some of these sectors fail, and data stored in them is at risk. The **Chkdsk** utility will search for bad sectors and evaluate the surface of your hard drive. To run this utility:

1. Click on **Start**.
2. Click on **My Computer**.
3. Right-click your **hard drive** and select **Properties**.
4. Select the **Tools** tab.
5. Click the **Check Now** button in the **Error-Checking** section.
6. Select both disk options: 1) automatically fix file system errors, 2) Scan for and attempt recovery of bad sectors.
7. Then click **Start** and **Yes** to the question, "Do you want to schedule this disk check to occur the next time you restart your computer?" The time required to check the disk at your next boot will vary with the size of your hard drive. Some experts suggest that you should **run this utility monthly**.

Disk Cleanup

As the least complicated of the Windows maintenance utilities, **Disk Cleanup** helps you eliminate clutter and maximize storage space on the PC. It helps by deleting unwanted files, such as temporary files, downloaded program files, and Recycle Bin files. In addition, it helps by showing you how to reduce the amount of space consumed by System Restore, as well as how to remove unwanted software and Windows components.

To access the utility:

1. Click the **Start** menu.
2. Select **All Programs**.
3. Select **Accessories**.
4. Select **System Tools**.
5. Select **Disk Cleanup**. A **Select Drive** dialog box will ask you to specify which drive you want to clean. Select the drive (usually C) from the Drives drop-down menu and click OK to continue.
6. At this time, you may see a pop-up message indicating that Disk Cleanup is calculating how much space it will be able to free up for you.

7. When Disk Cleanup finishes this task, the message will close automatically and the Disk Cleanup dialog box will open.
8. When it does, choose the Disk Cleanup tab. Here, you'll see a list of file types in a Files To Delete scroll-down area. To the right of each file type is a number indicating the amount of space that will become available if you remove files of that type from your system.
9. It's your job to indicate which file types you want to include in the cleanup by selecting the appropriate checkboxes. If you're not certain whether to delete files of a certain type, highlight the file type and review its description in the Description area.
10. You also can click the corresponding button (labeled as View Files, View Pages, or Details), if one is available, to see exactly which files meet the description. After selecting the file types you want to eliminate, click the OK button.
11. Disk Cleanup will present a message asking you to verify that you want to remove the selected files. Click Yes to continue and then wait for the process to finish.
12. Disk Cleanup will close automatically when the cleanup is complete.

To access the other components of Disk Cleanup, open the utility and click the **More Options** tab. Here, you'll see multiple options, including Windows Components and Installed Programs, each with a corresponding Clean Up button. Clicking a button lets you access the Windows utility that handles the selected task. For instance, clicking the Clean Up button next to the Installed Programs option launches the Add/Remove Programs utility.

Many experts suggest that you review the options found on the Disk Cleanup tab on a regular (**every two weeks**) basis to ensure your system isn't lugging around a bunch of space-hogging files that you don't really need.

Disk Cleanup might miss a few things. For instance, it won't delete anything that looks like a user-created file for fear that you might actually want it. With that in mind, it might be a good idea to browse around your **My Documents** folder for outdated documents you don't need or other folders on your hard drive for large graphics, video, and music files you no longer want.

Disk Defragmentation (Use it sparingly)

What happens when you save files on your computer's hard drive? For one thing, Windows does its best to use your hard drive space efficiently. It tries to fill in small gaps left behind by deleted files. To do it, Windows may split some files into pieces that will fit. This happens again and again as you move, delete or save files.

Eventually, all those split files affect your computer's speed. Your favorite program might be stored as dozens of fragments. Your computer has to find them all just to start it up. Your waiting time will eventually test your patience.

To keep your computer up to speed, you should defragment the hard drive periodically, but probably not more than every six months! (see box below.)

In its **June 26, 2006** issue, *PC World* reported that its test center set out to determine the effectiveness of the defrag utilities in popular sets of suites. Much to their surprise, their analysts found no evidence that defragmentation enhanced performance. On a desktop system from the *PC World* office with a heavily used, never-defragmented hard drive, the lab conducted speed tests using a range of applications before and after defragmenting the drive with each utility. In the end, the **Test Center saw no significant performance improvement after defragmenting with any program.** This result flies in the face of the perceived wisdom that fragmentation hinders performance, though much older PCs (with slower and smaller hard drives) and heavily used servers may benefit more from defragging.

Windows includes a handy tool for the job. It's aptly named Disk Defragmenter. Disk Defragmenter will sort those scattered fragments back together. You can find it by clicking **Start Button>All Programs>Accessories>System Tools.**

Disk Defragmenter can run into problems, however, so be very cautious about running it. Disk Defragmenter will stop if it discovers errors on your hard drive. This could cause the Defragmenter to stop consistently at the same place. It could also leave your hard drive only partially defragmented. **For this reason, always run the Windows Chkdsk utility first.**

The Defragmenter needs lots of space

A near-full hard drive is the bane of the Defragmenter. Windows requires at least 15 percent of your hard drive free to complete defragmentation. According to Microsoft, less space will result in an incomplete defragmentation.

(Check out your drive's free space by clicking on the **Start Button**, then clicking on **My Computer**. Right-click on your hard drive (generally named Local Disk C:), and then left-click on Properties. A pie graph will show you how much free space you have available.)

A nearly full hard drive is a likely culprit for older computers where hard drives are small by current standards. They could be quickly overwhelmed with videos and music. And new software packages tend to take more space than older versions. If you are running short on free hard drive space, consider using **Disk Cleanup** to free some hard drive space (described earlier in this document).

The Defragmenter must work alone

Disk Defragmenter does not play well with others. In fact, it often won't play at all if something else is running in the background. So it is necessary that all other programs be shut down while Disk Defragmenter is doing its thing.

Most experts advise that you run Defragmenter in **Safe Mode**. (Safe Mode lets you start your computer with a minimal set of programs running, which can make troubleshooting your system easier.) To do that, reboot the computer and keep tapping the F8 key during the boot up process. That should get you into a menu of startup options, including Safe Mode. If it doesn't, reboot and try again.

Once you get the menu, pick Safe Mode. It will look odd, because only a minimum of drivers and other programs are started with Windows. You will be able to run Disk Defragmenter in Safe Mode. When the defrag process is done, simply use Microsoft's standard procedures for rebooting your computer.

Installing Critical Patches From Microsoft

Microsoft periodically issues patches that fix vulnerabilities in the Windows operating system. Many of these are considered critical. However, if you are running a firewall, the danger is greatly reduced. Nonetheless, you should install these patches in a timely manner.

To activate the Automatic Update function:

1. Click on **Start**.
2. Right-click on **My Computer**.
3. Click on **Properties**.
4. Click on the **Automatic Updates tab**, and make your choices. It's best to select the option which will notify you of updates, but will not download them to your computer until you request them.

If you don't have automatic update turned on, you can update manually:

1. Open **Internet Explorer**.
2. Click **Tools**.
3. Click **Windows Update**.
4. Let Microsoft scan your computer.
5. Install any **Critical Updates** and **Security Packs**.

Delete Website Favorites That You No Longer Need

As your list of favorite Webpages grows, eventually you will find that it is so large that it contains many sites that you no longer need. During your fall cleaning activities, you may wish to clean up your Favorites list by deleting many of them. It won't save you much hard drive space; however, it will make searching for your true favorites a much easier and faster chore.

1. On the **Favorites** menu, click **Organize Favorites**.
2. In the right pane, find a Webpage that you wish to delete.
3. Right-click on the target site.
4. Left-click on Delete.

Unfortunately, you cannot delete multiple sites at one time. You must delete them one-by-one.

AM-Deadlink: <http://tinyurl.com/n3hd4>

AM-DeadLink is an excellent URL cleanup as it detects dead links and duplicates in your browser Favorites. If a Favorite has become unavailable you can delete it from your Browser. AM-DeadLink checks Favorites from Internet Explorer and Bookmarks from Firefox.

Reorganizing Your Website Favorites That Are Left

As your list of favorite pages grows, you can keep it organized by creating subject folders. You might want to organize your pages by topic. For example, you could create a folder named Health for storing information about health issues.

1. On the **Favorites** menu, click **Organize Favorites**.
2. Click **Create Folder**, type a name for the folder, and then press ENTER.
3. Drag the favorites in the list to the appropriate folder.

If the number of shortcuts or folders makes dragging impractical, you can use the **Move to Folder** button instead.

Taking a Look at Your Address Book for Obsolete Entries

Just as your Website Favorites lists tend to grow, the same is true for your address book. Now is a good time to go through your Address Book and cull any obsolete addresses.

1. Open your email client, e.g. Outlook Express or Outlook.
2. On the **Menu** bar, click on **Addresses**.
3. Right-click on any address that is obsolete.
4. Left-click on **Delete**.