

Radio Days – 2012-10-06

Discussion – Six-Monthly Check-up

The CFA urges us to change the batteries in our smoke alarms every six months when we change from Winter Time to Summer Time, then replace our batteries again when we change our clocks back again six months later. Their slogan is *Working Smoke Alarms Save Lives*. I urge you to check your computer and perform some simple tasks every six months to ensure that its performance stays as close to peak as possible.

There are a number of tasks which will only take you a few minutes to perform. These tasks will do a lot towards keeping your computer working closer to its peak, but they do not need much effort for the amount of result that they bring. This means that they are very effective because the results are out of proportion to the effort involved.

These are the tasks which I suggest you perform when Summer Time starts then, six months later, when Winter Time starts:

- Update all the programs on your hard disc
- Check your security programs
- Remove old temporary files
- Clean out the registry
- Remove unwanted startup programs
- Defragment your hard disc

Let's cover each of these tasks in more detail.

Update All Your Programs

All programs have errors which potentially allow other people to use these errors to have access to your computer. All program manufacturers want you to continue to use their programs so they keep providing you with updates to fix the errors in their programs to remove these errors. These two reasons explain why you should keep your programs updated.

My favourite program to help you keep your programs up to date is called Secunia PSI. If you have not yet downloaded the latest version (version 3) of Secunia PSI then I recommend that you download and install this free program now. After you have downloaded and installed PSI you can relax as it does most, but perhaps not all, of this needed updating for you automatically. The best part about Secunia is that it lets you know which programs need to be updated. This, alone, will save you so much time!

Still updating programs manually is much easier than finding all programs which need to be updated and then doing the full update manually. I am so glad that there are people who will take all the hard work out of keeping my computer as safe and clean as possible.

One thing to note: I found that the initial run of Secunia PSI took much longer than I had expected. I was expecting that the initial screen would disappear after about thirty seconds. Instead it took about two hours to display the final screen. During this time the program had downloaded and installed all the needed updates. This saved me lots of time but did cause me to worry that something had gone wrong! It may take longer than you expect for Secunia PSI to do its initial update but do not worry: it is working behind the scenes!

Once all the programs which can be updated automatically have been updated, and all the programs which need manual updating have been updated, then you can relax.

First job done!

Check Your Security Programs

Far too many people have an old anti-virus program. The problem with an out-of-date anti-virus program is that it conveys an unwarranted sense of security. This false sense of security will lull you into thinking that all is well with your computer's security.

Another problem is that many people think that, in this modern day, an anti-virus program is all that you need to keep your computer safe.

Both of these problems can lead to your computer becoming unusable because a nasty virus has penetrated your weak defences and is now wreaking as much havoc as it can before you notice anything wrong.

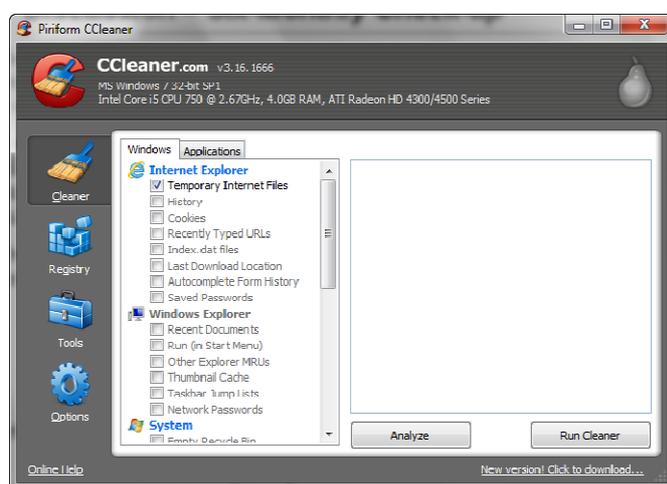
You should have an anti-virus program, not only to protect your computer but also to protect the computers of the other people who use the internet. There are plenty of good free ones out there. My recommendation is that you download and install Microsoft Security Essentials because it needs less intervention than most of the other anti-virus programs.

There are other free anti-virus programs available: two which would suggest are Avast and AVG Free. These are both available on the internet but both need more intervention on your part than Microsoft's anti-virus program.

Please make sure that you have an up-to-date anti-virus program, and that you stay online each time you go to the internet to allow your anti-virus program to update itself completely.

Second job done!

Remove Old Temporary Files



Many programs leave traces behind when they have finished. Sometimes this is intentional but often it is the result of a problem. Either way, these temporary files clutter up your hard disc and can slow your computer down quite considerably.

Enter CCleaner to the rescue.

If you have not downloaded and installed CCleaner then please do so now from the link at the end of this document. Once installed and run you will see a window like the one to the left.

Firstly you need to check, and possibly adjust, the settings. There are a number of sections in the left-hand part of the screen: I suggest that you ensure that you only check the following:

- Internet Explorer
 - Temporary Internet Files
- Windows Explorer
 - None
- System
 - Temporary Files
 - Clipboard
 - Memory Dumps
 - Chkdsk File Fragments
 - Windows Log Files
- Advanced
 - Old Prefetch Data

You will probably not know what each of these does, but that does not matter. If you follow my recommendations you will have a computer with most of the unwanted files removed.

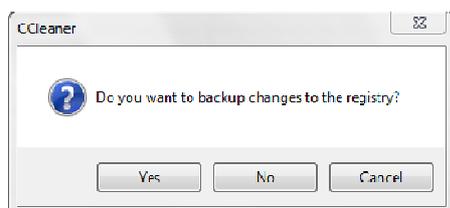
Now click on *Analyse* to start the process. Depending on your computer this could take from 20 seconds to 30 minutes to complete. While it is working you will see a green bar sliding

across the screen to show how much of the task has been completed. When it gets to 100% just click on *Run Cleaner* to remove all the files found.

Third job done!

Clean out the Registry

The registry is a Microsoft invention. It can quickly become cluttered with unwanted entries: these unwanted entries will slow your computer down and may make it unstable. There are many programs which offer to clean your registry but the only one which I know which is both free and does not do any damage is CCleaner.



After you have removed all the unwanted old temporary files you should clean the registry. CCleaner is still open so click on *Registry* in the left-hand column. Again, click on *Scan for Issues* to start the process. After the green bar has reached 100% you then click on *Fix Selected Issues* to complete the process. You will see a small dialogue box like the one to the left: please ensure that

you click on *Yes* to save the changes just in case there is a problem. I have only known one problem in several years of use so I do not expect that you will see one, however to be safe please backup the changes which CCleaner is about to make to your registry. Save the changes to *Documents* then click on *Fix All Selected Issues*. When the selected issues have been deleted just click on *Close* to complete the process.

Fourth job done!

Remove Unwanted Startup Programs

You are still in CCleaner so please click on *Tools* in the left-hand column then on *Startup*. This opens a new window which shows all the program which start automatically when your computer starts. Many of these programs are unnecessary and just slow your computer down so can be removed with impunity. Others are necessary so should not be removed at all. The trick is knowing which is which.

My suggestion is that you click on all the ones which you think that you do not need then click on *Disable*. This leaves the program still there but it will no longer start automatically. I suggest that you do this for one program at a time then restart your computer after each one. This allows to you see if there is a problem with disabling a particular program: if there is you just enable it and you are back to where you started. This may take some time but it will, if done correctly, give you a faster computer.

There are four tabs across the top of this window: *Windows*, *Internet Explorer*, *Scheduled Tasks* and *Context Menu*. Please repeat this procedure with all four tabs then restart your computer. If there are any problems then you will just have to *Enable* the last program which you *Disabled*.

Fifth job done!

Defragment Hard Discs

The next step, now that you have removed all unwanted files to clear space on your hard disc, is to defragment it. Defragmenting a hard disc is the process of tidying all the files on your hard disc. As you (or Windows) create, change or remove files, different parts of your files can be placed in different parts of your hard disc. Defragmenting a file involves finding all the different parts of a file and placing them in one single block. This makes your computer faster because it is not hunting all over your hard disc for the various parts of a file.

There are two programs which I recommend: *Defraggler* and *MyDefrag*. Because they use different ways of defragmenting I recommend that you chose one and stick to it. If you mix and match you will find that each program will undo the changes made by the other each time you start it. Of the two, I find that *MyDefrag* is the better.

Defraggler wants to know which disc to defragment: you select the disc to be defragmented (most computers have only one disc, but you still have to select it) then click on *Defrag*: this starts the process. You can then select *Settings » Shutdown after Defrag* and go to bed: the rest happens automatically and, as if by magic, your computer will put itself to sleep.

MyDefrag works slightly differently: all discs are defragmented in one hit so there is no need to select a disc to defragment. Just start MyDefrag and all your hard discs are defragmented one after the other. This program does not have the option to shut your computer at end.

Both programs may take a number of hours if you have never done a defragment of that disc before, but that does not matter. If you decide to stop a defragment before it has completed its task it will just continue from where it left off next time you start it. This means that you can do a complete defragment in a number of steps rather than in one enormous bite of time. Defragmenting has never been so easy!

Sixth job done!

Further Information

Secunia PSI	www.secunia.com
Microsoft Security Essentials	www.microsoft.com/mse
AVG Free	www.avgfree.com.au
Avast	www.avast.com
CCleaner	www.piriform.com
Defraggler	www.piriform.com
MyDefrag	www.mydefrag.com