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MALPRACTICE AVOIDANCE NEWSLETTER FOR OREGON LAWYERS

IN BRIEF

THIS ISSUE

May 2004

Issue No. 92

TECHNOLOGY TIPS: POWER FLUCTUATIONS

Power surges and power spikes are short yet significant increases in the voltage of the line. Power disruptions are breaks in the flow of electricity, and brownouts are voltage sags. All of these power interruptions can potentially damage your computer or computer network. Many people mistakenly assume that a power strip or basic surge protector will completely protect against all power hazards. Many also believe that the primary danger to their computers is lightning or a serious electrical storm. This article discusses some of the most common hazards and how you can protect your systems from them.

Of the lesser-known hazards, high-powered electrical devices are a major concern. Elevators and air conditioners, for example, require considerable energy to switch off and on. This switching briefly upsets the steady voltage flow in the electrical system and is potentially severe enough to cause gradual damage that builds over time or even, if significant enough, immediate damage. Voltage swings occur regularly in commercial buildings. Couple these voltage swings with problems created by faulty wiring, utility company equipment, and repair work on downed lines, and it becomes apparent that fluctuation in power is unavoidable.

The best protection against all power fluctuation is a UPS (uninterruptible power supply). UPS devices are now relatively inexpensive and have many positive attributes. They guard against both brownouts and surges, clean and condi-

tion the electrical current, and provide power for a limited time during a power failure so you can properly close your files and turn off your computer and other devices. In addition, a UPS will protect your database programs that may be susceptible to corruption during a power outage. A UPS is preferable to a surge protector since the UPS features surge protection plus a lot more, yet is still very affordable.

If you choose to use only a surge protector, be sure your computer is a workstation on a network and the network's data is stored elsewhere on a file server. In addition, don't store data on your hard drive. When looking at surge protection, buy only a protector that comes with an Underwriters Laboratory (UL) rating and one that is listed as a transient voltage surge suppressor. Be sure the protector has an indicator light to tell you whether the protection components are still working. It is possible for the protection components to fail after repeated power surges, yet the power strip components still function. If phone lines or coaxial cables are connected to your computer, buy a protector with phone-line-input jacks and/or a cable connection. Surges on these lines can cause just as much damage as a power line surge.

Whether you buy a surge protector or a UPS device, look for one with a connected equipment warranty. If the device fails to protect your computer during a power surge, the manufacturer of the protector will replace your computer. Some protectors also offer a data recovery warranty, although keep in mind that the manufacturer cannot replace the *data*

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stored on your computer and it may not be possible to retrieve data from a computer damaged by power surges.

APC (American Power Conversion) is the “name brand” of UPS devices. You can order directly from its Web site, www.apcc.com, or from Dell, Gateway, local computer stores, or office supply stores. To find which UPS device is appropriate for you, you will need to determine the total wattage you want to plug into the UPS.

All of these reasons provide motivation to back up your computer system regularly. For information on backing up your system, go to www.osbplf.org, click on Loss Prevention Material, Practice Aids and Forms, Disaster Recovery, Protecting Your Firm.

Our thanks to Mark Bassingthwaighte of ALPS; Beverly Michaelis, PLF Practice Management Advisor; and Ellen Freedman, CLM, Law Practice Management Coordinator at the Pennsylvania Bar Association, for providing these tips.