

Protecting Electronics during a Storm

Electrical items are vulnerable during storms as their electronics are sensitive to variations in electricity supply. A spike is a rise in voltage in an electrical circuit above the electrical device's normal operating voltage. Spikes can be caused by lightning strikes, power outages and short circuits. Spikes only last for milliseconds and as a result sometimes only fuses are blown though often electronics are destroyed. A surge is also caused by lightning strikes, power outages and short circuits, however instead of only lasting for a few milliseconds surges can last for several seconds, meaning they often cause much more damage than spikes.

During a thunder and lightning storm most people do not unplug their phone line unaware high voltage will carry into equipment connected to the line such as phones, faxes and computers. If there is a surge or spike in the electricity supply, modems and phones are often the first pieces of electronic equipment affected. This is because of the very fragile components. Surges and spikes can travel down the power line and directly into electronics plugged into the power point. Sometimes you will be lucky and nothing is blown up however large surges can destroy computers, TV's and other electrical devices plugged into the power point. When electronics are damaged it will often work out cheaper to replace the whole device rather than just the broken components. This means spikes and surges can not only be an expensive but also an inconvenient accident causing the loss of important personal or business data.

If a storm is coming the best way to prevent your computer from electrical spikes is to shut it down, then unplug your computer, modem and monitor from the power points and the phone line. If you have an external modem, unplug it from the power point and the phone line. A couple of common mistakes people make is to only turn the power off at the switch rather than unplug the power cords or to only unplug the power not the phone line.

If you're not home when there's a storm or the storm is unexpected an Uninterruptable Power Supply (UPS) with built in surge protector will minimise the influence of spikes and surges and keep your computer operating when the power if off. After a long black out, a

UPS will allow the computer to shut down properly minimising the chances of losing data. UPS range in price from hundreds of dollars to thousands of dollars depending on how long you want the computer to run for during a black out, and the level of surge protection you require. Some UPS provide surge protection for phone lines and ethernet cables which gives added surge protection value. Many power boards are available with built in surge protection and they start at about \$10 each. Surge protection is one area where you get what you pay for. A decent UPS with surge protection will cost around \$200 - \$300 and anything under this price will probably be ineffective.

To minimise the influence of spikes and surges in addition to a UPS I recommend external hard drive back ups and regular backups to CDs or DVDs. This means you always have a recent backup of your data just in case the UPS isn't able to stop a large surge and your computer is destroyed. If the UPS doesn't protect you in a particular storm some brands will pay to repair your computer and recover your lost data.

It is a bad idea to talk to on the phone during a storm. Many people have been electrocuted and died from a surge down the phone line. If you need to make a call during a storm it is safer on a mobile phone or a cordless phone as there is no physical connection between you and the phone line. Cordless phone base stations can explode during a storm if the phone is being used, so avoid standing too close when making your call.

Storms are not the only time when electronic equipments are subjected to power variations. Even normal electricity supply will experience variations in voltage. People who run generators will also experience voltage fluctuations and this indicates that UPS provide important protection to electronic devices on a day to day basis even when there are no storms. The UPS keeps the voltage constant which protects your computer and therefore any important data. You can also put a UPS on other electronics. Depending on how much power the devices draws, it will affect what specifications you require in a UPS and therefore the price of the UPS

Seniors mobile phone classes have started however there are still a few positions available. Two mobile phones will be given away to participants of these phone classes so register

your name with Josh and go in the draw to win a Samsung A411 prepaid mobile phone. If you would like to purchase a UPS, ask questions about protecting electronic equipment or to simply register for the free mobile phone classes come in and see Josh or call him on 6343 1720.