

Protect Your Laptop

Best Practices

Related Tip Sheet: Practice Safe Computing

Introduction

Would you be lost without your laptop? When your computer plays a vital role in your everyday life at the University, it's a good idea to take some simple steps to keep it safe and functioning. This tip sheet provides information on how to prevent theft or damage, and advice on what to do should either occur.

Be kind to your machine

Laptops are convenient, reliable machines, but to keep yours that way, you should take basic precautions. Avoid eating or drinking food around your laptop, as one crumb or drop of soda could send your computer to the shop. Laptops emit a lot of heat, so it's important to allow your machine to ventilate properly and not expose it to intense heat or sun for long periods of time. Just like you, your laptop may need to take a break. Instead of always using the hibernate option, make sure you shut down your computer completely on a regular basis.

Back up and encrypt your data

Often, it is the loss of data from laptops rather than the loss of laptops themselves that causes the most problems. Back up your computer's hard drive to a separate device (such as a USB drive or external hard drive) or a file share (such as WebShare) on a regular basis, to ensure that you will still have all your important files in the event that your laptop is lost, stolen or suffers data loss.

As a security measure, you can encrypt files on your computer if they contain sensitive information. (It is best never to store banking information, personal data, or passwords on your laptop.) Encrypted files can only be opened with an encryption key or password. Detailed information about easy ways to encrypt for your files can be found at nsit.uchicago.edu/docs/encryption.

Be Prepared

Security updates, antivirus updates and software patches continually become available for your computer. Keeping up to date with new patches is crucial to maintaining the safety and health of your laptop.

In the event of a virus or other problem, you may need reinstall your computer's operating system. Always keep the system software or recovery CDs/DVDs with you to save time and money.

For additional assistance

Please email support@uchicago.edu or call 4-TECH



Avoid theft and misuse

Laptops are light, convenient and so easy to just leave sitting out while you run for coffee...But stop! Don't let that be the last time you ever see your laptop again. Password protect your laptop to discourage theft, and consider investing in one of the many physical laptop locks on the market.

The University of Chicago Police Department offers the computer theft-deterrent program STOP tag. A security plate and warning label are attached to the computer with an activating gel that takes up to 800 lbs of pressure to remove. Ownership information is entered into an international database. Contact the UCPD at 773-834-3081 for more information.

Keep your laptop yours. Only loan your laptop to those you trust; whatever spyware, viruses, or illegal content that end up on your laptop will be yours to deal with.

In Case of Theft

Even if your laptop is stolen, there is software available that enables laptop owners to track the location of a missing laptop as soon as it is connected to the Internet. Adeona (adeona.cs.washington.edu) is a free, open source program that provides this capability. There are also commercial versions available.

