

THE COMPUTER CORNER

## **No. 104. Window Washer**

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Every now and then a really useful program comes along that meets a need. That is the way the "big" ones started – Norton Utilities (started as Peter Norton's Speedisk back in the early 1980s, if memory serves me correctly), Partition Magic, and so on. There is a need that is not being met or is being met only poorly and someone writes a jewel that does the job. Window Washer is the latest.

We all need a way to remove the garbage from our computers. Actually, Norton Utilities (now called Norton System Works) has a function called Clean Sweep that does a passable job at it. However, Peter Norton Computing did not write the utility. Rather, they bought the Clean Sweep software from a company of the same name and folded it into their utilities. It does other things as well as cleanup tasks, but it is the Fast and Safe Cleanup function that does what the name implies. Don't get me wrong – Fast and Safe Cleanup is fairly good, but Window Washer is far more thorough.

There are two basic issues that Window Washer addresses. First is the issue of space, taken up by useless files that should have been cleaned up by sloppy software, but were not. These can accumulate over time into hundreds of megabytes of wasted space. True, large hard drives today make that less of an issue than in the past. But, that's like saying that it is OK to have sloppy, filled up closets now that we have moved into a new house with more closet space. Everyone should work clean with their computer space, for maximum efficiency.

The second issue is security of personal information. Windows stores huge amounts of information on what web sites you have visited, what files you have opened and edited, what pictures you have opened and viewed, and so on, and it keeps this information directly on your hard drive. This may not be an issue for you if you are a single user of the machine in a reasonably secure environment such as at home, but in an office environment, that is a different story. Even at home, unless you have in place a highly secure firewall (Zone Alarm is the best, and it is still free!), automated hacking programs can get into your machine and capture any or all of that data, and other personal information as well. So, Window Washer addresses the two big S-issues, Space and Security, with special emphasis on Security.

You can run the program whenever you feel the need, or you can have it run on startup or shutdown, or you can have it automatically run anywhere from every 15 minutes to once a month. I prefer to do it manually when I choose, but just about any option is available. The first time I ran it on one of my machines, it removed over 100 Mbytes (10% of a gigabyte) of useless garbage that was just taking up space. Below is a partial list of stuff it cleans up when run.

- C:\Windows\Temp: Usually populated with junk files left over from old installations; it cleans out all the files in this folder.
- Recycle Bin: Everything in this directory is erased.
- Windows Run History: All records of everything you have done with the Start, RUN button.

- Document and Find Histories: Removes all notes of the documents you have opened recently, as well as records of the items you have used the Run, FIND function to search for.
- Scan Disk: Removes useless \*.CHK files that Scan Disk writes to each drive when run.
- Media Player: If you use Windows Media Player, Washer removes just the history of items that have been used, but not the items themselves.
- Browsers: Washer cleans up Netscape's cookies, cache, trash mailbox and history, and Internet Explorer's cookies, cache and history. It will also clean histories if you have AOL on your system.
- Office Tracks: If you use MS-Office, Washer cleans out Most Recently Used (MRU) records when you selected Open, Insert Picture, Save As and other office functions.

Personally, I deselect Office Tracks in Washer, because it removes some default settings that I prefer when writing. For example, as I write this article in Word, the screen is displaying text boundaries and all formatting marks such as tab characters, paragraph marks, spaces and so on. If I let Washer clean Office tracks, the default Office settings are restored and I need to reset my personal preferences each time I open a new document. So, a simple click in Washer can deselect Office Tracks, or any other item listed above that you want Washer to leave alone. In other words, Washer is flexible enough to tailor to your specific needs and preferences.

Window Washer is not free. On the other hand, you can download a free trial version that is exactly the same as the full version, though it will quit working after the trial period expires. Expect to pay \$29.95 for the full version. Well worth it, in my opinion. Sniff around **<http://webroot.com>** to find it among other software packages the company sells. You can pay for it online and download it, or order it on CD-ROM. It comes with free upgrades for a period of one year. Be sure to read the documentation so you can tailor it to your personal work style, before you run it. While it is safe and effective, tailoring it will ensure that there will be no surprises, and it will do just what you want and no more. Good stuff. Happy computing!