

The Best Available Cure-All for Windows

- by Stan Kaplan, WB9RQR
105 Martin Drive
Port Washington, WI 53074-9654
(262) 284-9346
skaplan@mcw.edu

First things first. Say Happy Birthday to Computer Corner. Last month's article was the end of the sixth consecutive year of this column, and this issue is the beginning of the seventh.

Lest you begin to suspect it after reading this issue, no I do not work for Symantec, the company that produces Norton Utilities. It is just that, when a mechanic finds a very, very useful wrench, one that makes his work soooo much easier, he tends to rant and rave about it. That is how I feel about Norton Utilities, and have felt that way since back in the 1970s when I was first introduced to it. It makes my work soooo much easier.

If you have Norton Utilities, or better, Norton SystemWorks 2000 (the latest), but have not really put it to use, do so soon. I really recommend the System Check utility for identifying and correcting errors with all types of problems. If you launch this utility with all options selected, it will examine your system for disk and Windows problems as well as making suggestions to improve performance and keep up with your preventive maintenance. Probably the most valuable part of the scan it does is to examine your Windows Registry, a large database that relates every part of your system. Just as one example, it will look for missing programs if they exist somewhere other than where the Registry thinks they are. If it finds them, it will correct the Registry and any shortcuts so that they can be found when you call for that program to be used. If it cannot find them, it will remove (but only with your permission) any reference to them from the Registry. This restores your ability to use the program when you call for it, or prevents an error message from appearing when you try to use a program that no longer exists on your system. In other words, it cleans up your system so that it works as it should. Norton WinDoctor (another utility) does much the same, but it skips some of the hardware checks that System Check includes. Both are there for you to use, but the System Check is more comprehensive. System Check alone is worth the price of the package, in my opinion.

There are many other goodies included with the package. The old standby, Norton Disk Doctor is there, which finds and corrects lost or cross-linked clusters. Cross-linked clusters describe the situation in which two different files are assigned one or more of the same clusters, something to be avoided like the plague. A lost cluster is data on the disk that DOS (Disk Operating System) thinks is assigned to a file, when it really is not. Yes, DOS exists, under both Windows 95 and 98! Windows is just a Graphical User Interface and must ask DOS to carry out many of the functions it wants to have done. At any rate, NDD will find and correct those errors, making your system perk along without losing your valuable data. Another old standby, Unerase, is there too. Did you ever accidentally delete a file? Unerase can bring it back, quickly and easily. It can do that because when you delete a file, you do not really erase it from the disk. Rather, the first letter of the filename is changed to a symbol that tells DOS that the space occupied by the file on the disk may be re-used. If you ask Unerase to restore it quickly, before writing a bunch of other stuff to the disk, the utility can do a perfect job. This is almost always the case with files moved to the wastebasket.

Speed Disk is another utility that has been around for a long time. Indeed, this utility is what gave Peter Norton his reputation in the first place. SD will rearrange the files on your hard drive so that no file is broken up into pieces and strewn all over the place, a natural occurrence as you do your daily work. It finds all the pieces and puts them together again in a series of consecutive places

on the disk. Too bad we do not have a utility that could put magazine articles together, so that no "continued on page 6" notices were needed! The Optimization Wizard is another useful utility, but a rather new one that did not exist before Windows 95. It reorganizes and compacts the Registry, so that this large database can be read and utilized more efficiently and quickly. This is another utility worth the price of admission by itself.

There are at least eight more utilities in the package that are extremely useful. Beyond that, Norton Antivirus (updated every two weeks or so), Cleansweep and CrashGuard are also there. CrashGuard does just that. It intercepts crashes in your system - lock ups such as when everything quits and you cannot even restart the system without hitting the reset button. I have had CrashGuard save valuable data (typing), when it most surely would have been lost without this wonderful program.

There is no doubt about it. Norton SystemWorks 2000 is worth your hard-earned money. Excellence is excellence. It will save you a lot of grief from Windows troubles. The shame of it is, we would not need such utilities if Windows were not so poorly written. Happy computing!