

# Computer Corner

## BEWARE: DON'T GET BIT!

**A**s we review accomplishments in 2015 and look forward to advancements coming in 2016, I would like to make some suggestions of things for municipal and rural water utility offices to consider, along with some advice of caution. And the same recommendations go to readers personally.

In 2015, the new Windows10 Microsoft Operating System was released. As a result, 2016 will be the "year of Windows10". Millions of users of Windows7, and newer versions, receive daily reminders that they can get a FREE "like" version upgrade to Windows10 until mid June 2016. "Like" in this case means that if the user has Windows7 Home, they can upgrade to 10Home for free, or from Windows7 or 8 Professional to Professional version 10, etc. Millions have already upgraded, some with contented results, some with minor irritations while others experienced downright disasters. I have upgraded several of our computers in the office without problems of any sort. We did so, not because of any eagerness to make the change but because, we want to be on top of anything any of our customers might need, so our experience must be broad. We will probably wait until May to upgrade remaining machines just to have more updates and bug fixes in place before we totally convert.

Windows10 is the first cross platform version of the Windows Operating System. The "cross platform" I am referring to is a design that allows for a single version of an operating system to be able to run on Desktop PCs and tablets, as well as other mobile devices. And, therefore, Windows10 is a major leap for the software industry in allowing programs designed to run on Windows10 to be capable of running on all types of devices using Windows10. Windows10 has some exciting new features; those were detailed in the November 2015 issue of *The Kansas Lifeline*.



### **BEWARE** when UPGRADING to Windows10!

Think of Windows10 as a BIG service/guard dog with many improved security features, but it's really still a pooch that hasn't quite completed all its training... and it "might" bite. From the test computers in our office and from what friends in the computer industry have reported to us as well as what we have read,

Windows10 may, in fact, someday be deserving of a blue ribbon like WindowsXP came to be with time and Windows7. But for now, one may find it just isn't totally housebroken. Bringing this mutt home prematurely, or without the proper precautions, could result in a big mess to clean up.

Recently, I have had several emails and phone calls from people who were experiencing a problem while attempting to complete the free upgrade from Windows7, 8 or 8.1 to Windows10. Most of them lost data; their computers needed a technician to repair and restore software and data. Several had problems with office equipment or meter reading equipment no longer functioning after upgrading to Windows10. Yet, I know of even more people who have made the transition without difficulty of any kind with the exception of the need to become familiar with new features and old features that have a different look or name.

## Considerations before upgrading to Windows10 . . .

- 1. BACKUP, BACKUP, BACKUP** anything you don't want to risk losing before you upgrade to Windows10. I cannot stress enough the importance of having good regular backups of your data. Don't get bit!
- 2. DO NOT upgrade to Windows10** before checking with software and hardware providers to ensure that any important software programs/drivers will continue to run properly in Windows10. All of our company's new products are Windows10 compatible, but, we too have customers who may be currently using an older generation of our software that would need to be upgraded when moving to Windows10. Some software companies may not have completed development of their Windows10 software yet, so, if those products are important to the user, it would be unwise to move to an operating system that will not run the software programs. If there are available upgrades or updates to a Windows10 version of the software in question, know the cost and policies concerning the upgrade. If there is a cost, is it a one time upgrade charge, or, is there a recurring subscription fee for continued use or an annual update/subscription or support fee? The industry is moving towards putting customers in the position of paying regular subscription fees for continued use of software instead of the user deciding when they want to purchase a user license for a new software program or for an upgrade. Salespersons usually try to make this change sound like a great advantage to the customer, when in fact, the advantage is for the company that is selling the product, creating a steady revenue flow for them. Like most things in life it is best to know the details and consider the ramifications before entering into any agreement.
- 3.** If there is an electronic meter reading system or some other specialized secondary hardware and/or software used then refer back to #2 above and proceed accordingly.
- 4.** All other hardware such as scanners, printers, multifunction devices, and other specialized devices, and their drivers need to be checked for Windows10 compatibility BEFORE upgrading. Failure to do so could result in a big surprise and unexpected expenses.
- 5.** Investigate and know the answers to all the above BEFORE upgrading to Windows10, but, to reiterate #1, first and foremost – **BACKUP, BACKUP, BACKUP!**



### Dogs have big ears and excellent hearing

For those concerned about Microsoft collecting data about computer activities, i.e., big brother listening in as Google and Facebook do, choose the option to NOT turn on Cortana during the setup process. If this sort of Internet data collection of personal user habits is not a concern to you, then allow Cortana to be turned on. Many people love having this computerized helper that is always handy to answer questions. The fact is, if a person spends much time on the Internet at all, they might as well expect a certain amount of "spying" even if the effort has been made to turn off programs known for "spying" like Google, Cortana and Bing. This technique is common and widespread. Even with privacy settings invoked, Windows10 still "spies" on the user and reports computer activities to Microsoft servers

Data on everything that anyone does on the Internet is collected, tracked and tabulated into statistics. Whether by the ISP (Internet Service Provider), Facebook, Google, Bing, Cortana or the government NSA folks, some electronic eye is watching, often looking for a way

to get into your pocket! For this reason, I always preach that while the Internet is an extremely useful tool, the risks should not be taken lightly. I always recommend that nothing should be put on the Internet, and I am including in this "storage on the "Cloud" that one would mind sharing with a gaggle of scoundrels and thieves.

### Some of the Good Features in Windows10

Microsoft did release a much needed update a couple of months ago that addressed quite a number of problems previously experienced by some users during the Windows10 upgrade process, as well as making other needed improvements. But still, there have been many reports of persons losing data during the upgrade process, experiencing a complete operating system corruption, resulting in loss of all data, problems with devices and drivers having compatibility problems after upgrading to Windows10, and failure of the 30-day "revert back" feature that is intended to allow "restoring back" to their previous version of Windows7, 8 or 8.1.

During a Windows10 upgrade, Microsoft will ask if it is OK to download and install updates during the installation. Be sure to answer in the affirmative so bug fixes will be provided as needed. That one act alone may prevent a problem or problems during the installation of the upgrade.



### Free features and add-ons

Microsoft seems to have finally decided to give in to customer demands to return the program menu feature, although it looks a bit different and some things are named differently.

New options include Microsoft Edge Browser aimed at replacing Internet Explorer.

A new WebNote feature allows making annotations on screen shots for saving or sharing.

You will still find favorites under “All Programs” “Microsoft Accessories” including Sticky Notes and the Snipping Tool.

Like many users, we missed the really nice folder and file search feature that was so handy on WindowsXP when Microsoft inexplicably left it out of Windows7, so we recommended people download the popular search “Everything” by Voidtools program to replace what before had been built in. Microsoft has reinstated this handy feature in Windows10. But, for those not upgrading to Windows10 right away, I still encourage anyone who misses the old search feature from WindowsXP to go to [www.download.cnet.com](http://www.download.cnet.com) and get the search program called “Everything”.

### Most commonly used antivirus and malware tools

Avast and AVG are commonly used antivirus programs; both have FREE, Pro and Business versions. AVG even has a new “all devices version” to use on all household computers and devices.

There are many other popular security and safety tools available, some at a cost, some for free. They include: CCleaner, Glary Utilities, Advanced System Care, Spybot, MalwareBytes, Kaspersky, Bitdefender, McAfee, TrendMicro, Panda, Norton and more.

Recently one of our customers wanted some help from AVG and innocently typed into her search field “AVG help”. This provided her with a phone number. She called the number and began what she thought was a technical support conversation with a representative of AVG. She allowed them to gain remote access to her computer while they talked. She became suspicious when the person asked her for her credit card number. Of course, she wasn’t speaking to AVG but was instead to a company that snatches up AVG customers running searches, as she did. She hung up on them, but it was too late. The hacker had made it so anytime our customer turned on her computer, the computer would automatically load a remote access link to the hacker. It took me almost an hour of research to report back to her what had taken place and to connect her with the actual AVG company so that they could support their software, help her with her original problem and now, also, kick the impostors to the curb.

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[www.download.cnet.com](http://www.download.cnet.com) Web site that is considered by many to be one of the very few safe places to download freeware/shareware. Even so, pay attention to the installation options to avoid ending up with all kinds of unwanted third party add-on programs.

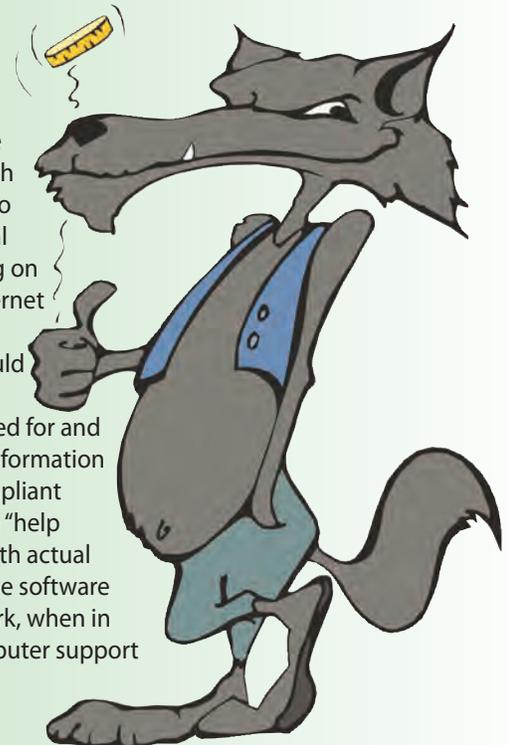
**A dog may be man’s best friend, but the Internet is often more of a wolf!**

There has been an increasing number of phishing emails going around. Phishing is a method of a cyber-attack in which hackers try to acquire sensitive data via a malicious email link.

Beware of replicas of commercial Web sites. An example would be an email that claims your inbox is full and that the user needs to purchase an upgrade or confirm account information in order to keep emails from being blocked. The email suggests to click on the link shown to prevent experiencing loss of email services. Don’t do it! Use the support section of the email service and follow the directions for reporting the spam/phishing attempt.

I mentioned one of our customers who recently fell victim to one of these “impersonating” support services that appear to be the actual originating company’s technical support. Such a site may sound legitimate with a name something link:

[support.quickbooks.com](http://support.quickbooks.com) rather than the actual site for Quickbooks, which is Intuit.com. In her case she needed to be working with AVG.com. It is important to pay attention to the actual address line when clicking on links from an email or Internet search. Rather than trust “Googling” for help, it would be better to open the program the help is needed for and find the correct contact information there. Most Windows compliant software programs have a “help about/contact” section with actual contact information for the software vendor. If that doesn’t work, when in doubt, pay a trusted computer support person to assist.



The impersonating companies regularly answer the phone with something like: "Quickbooks Support..." or "AVG Support" making a point of NOT actually saying they are Intuit or AVG, just making the claim to support those programs. They will likely ask the victim to click on a link to install a remote access program on the computer, after which, the hacker is in control. Then, after a while, the hacker gets around to asking for a credit card number explaining that these services come at a cost. Don't give out credit card information without complete certainty the company is who it seems to be. If found in this situation, shut down the computer and call for local, trusted, legitimate, computer technical support.

Another water office recently received the old "we have detected your computer sending out messages" and "we need to fix it for you" message on their screen. They thought it was Microsoft. Of course, Microsoft NEVER does sends such message nor do they telephone people to announce such a thing. It was a scammer trying to trick the water system clerk

**Another common threat is "ransomware". While on the Internet a warning may pop up saying a terrible virus has been detected and instructs the user to "Click" on the link shown to fix it. DO NOT CLICK ON ANYTHING.**

into granting access to the billing computer.

Another common threat is "ransomware". While on the Internet a warning may pop up saying a terrible virus has been detected and instructs the user to "Click" on the link shown to fix it. DO NOT CLICK ON ANYTHING. Don't pay any ransom. Call your computer support person. I have heard horror stories of persons paying the ransom and be held up repeatedly and still not getting their data back. Remember, these are computer criminals; they are not trustworthy.

The Internet is a Wonderful World of incredible things, but also filled with people with bad intentions looking for easy victims. My advice: "Be safe and be careful!"

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