

## Thunder?

Just in case you were not in the Var during the last few weeks, the weather has been pretty awful for sunny Provence with a considerable amount of storms. Storms not only mean torrential rain, but are often preceded but numerous claps of thunder – not your computers best friend!

Unfortunately these recent storms have sent more than 1 computer to its grave and knocked out a considerable amount of ADSL modem/routers and lines. I am not a lightening specialist, nor can I explain why spikes of electricity can come down the phone line or the electricity lines, get through the fuse box etc. and damage your computer. All I know is that it happens, and computers and ADSL modems are very sensitive to such electrical surges with the modems being blown while your normal landline phone is completely unaffected. There is no clear explanation as to why these modems to blow so regularly, with part of the opinion claiming that residential ADSL modems are manufactured from cheap/poor quality components, while others claim they are just more sensitive to surges on the phone line.

There are a variety of measures you can take to limit the chances of a storm damaging your computer setup. Firstly there is the local favourite:

- Just unplug everything when you hear a storm coming! Apart from the fact that you might be out when the storm arrives, it is actually the only guaranteed method of ensuring lightening does not destroy your computer or your ADSL modem. I would not recommend this as the best method (you might be out, asleep, forgetful....) though you can certainly unplug everything when you are in just to be sure

- Surge protectors! There are a variety of different products that are generally included in this category under the heading of “Parasurtenseur”, these are:

- Parafoudre: this does exactly as the name suggests, and protects your equipment from “La Foudre” – lightening strikes. When a big surge comes shooting down the electricity lines at your computer, it will cut the power and protect the equipment plugged into it. However, it only protects from big surges, and would not necessarily do anything if the surge was around 260 volts or so.
- Onduleur: this is the next step up from a Parafoudre, and actually regulates the electricity coming through so that even the mildest spikes above 220 volts are smoothed out, including the large surges from lightening.
- UPS (Uninterruptible Power Supply): This is an Onduleur that also contains a battery pack which will allow the PC to carry on running even though the electricity supply has been cut. In theory you can thus carry on working during the storm, and should there be a power cut the battery will take over, and should there be a surge in the electricity supply, the Onduleur will smooth it out. However a UPS will not typically keep your PC running more than 5-10 minutes, but does give you time to save what you are doing and then shutdown. Most will also come with a USB connection and software that will save and shutdown for you should you be away from the machine at the time. Do read the manual carefully, as different sockets on the UPS have different functions, and it would be shame to have one but not have the computer plugged into the correct socket i.e. during a power cut the computer loses power, but your printer stays on!

Using any of these products is definitely better than using none, but it is also highly recommended to buy one that will allow you to plug the phone line through it, thus protecting your broadband modem/router too (which is more than likely also connected to your computer).

Just to summarize:

- Using any of the 3 products mentioned above is better than nothing
- Plug all the IT equipment into the Surge Protector – printer, router, anything that is in some way connected to the computer, as a surge can run through the printer and get into your computer via the USB lead
- Ensure the phone line goes from the wall socket to the “In” on the surge protector, and the from the “Out” to the ADSL modem
- To be doubly safe, unplug everything when you hear the storm coming
- Remember to unplug your laptop from its charger and work of the battery during stormy weather
- You can also use a Surge Protector on other electrical equipment, such as LCD or Plasma TVs, Hifi etc.

Finally all these products will only work if your house electrical installation has a good earth – that’s where the surge gets diverted to. If there is a poor earth or no earth at all (you have an old fashioned socket on the wall with only 2 holes in the socket, then there is no earth) should there a big surge down the electricity or phone line, just cross your fingers and hope you are one of the lucky ones.

For computer problems and advice, please contact: Edward on 06 26 98 03 12 or by email on [ed@emarshall.fr](mailto:ed@emarshall.fr) All previous VVV Computer articles can be found at [www.emarshall.fr](http://www.emarshall.fr)