

Why doesn't Microsoft give every employee a UPS?

 devblogs.microsoft.com/oldnewthing/20050919-13

September 19, 2005



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One reaction to my story about the oldest computer at Microsoft still doing useful work was shock (shock!) that Microsoft suffers from power outages.

In the Pacific Northwest, winter windstorms are quite common, and it is not unexpected that a windstorm blow down tall trees (which are also quite common) which in turn take out power lines. And if those power lines supply Microsoft main campus, then main campus loses power.

All the critical computers have UPSs so that they can make a soft landing when the power goes out, but it's hardly the case that every single computer in every office and lab gets a UPS. That would be prohibitively expensive and wouldn't accomplish much anyway. Sure, each of the five computers in your office might stay alive for another fifteen minutes, but this assumes that you're actually in your office to shut them down cleanly when the power goes out. If your machine is frozen into the debugger, no amount of software-automated shutdown will help. (A frozen machine cannot shut itself down.)

In other words, the cost-benefit of giving every employee a UPS for each machine in their office simply doesn't pan out.

In the last few days of 1999, the main Windows development building was prepared for a wholesale catastrophe. Generator trucks were brought in so that the entire building could be kept up and running should the power fail as part of a worldwide Year 2000 meltdown. Those trucks were **huge** and no doubt extremely expensive.

And thankfully were never needed.

Those who were in Los Angeles last week for the PDC might be amused to learn that the PDC technical staff, fearing a repeat of Monday's blackout, rented a generator truck to provide emergency backup power for all the machines on stage for Bill Gates' and Jim Allchin's keynote addresses. The power may go out in Los Angeles, but the PDC keynote must go on!

More musings about power outages next time.



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