

Computer Corner

The Next Version of Windows is Here – Meet Windows 11

As promised in our last article “Internet Trick or Treating” about safely navigating the Web, this issue’s column is on the subject of the new Windows 11 operating system. In the November 2021 issue, we warned there could be a few things about Microsoft’s latest release that might prove a little scary (it was Halloween time). Windows 11 is here!

Windows 11 is already installed on many new computers and current Windows 10 users are getting update option messages on their computers. The following information we hope will make the decision to update a little easier. Most users will upgrade to the new system without incident and enjoy lots of great new features and improvements. But for some, the experience could be painful or even a mistake at this time.

Many members of the public have become conditioned to believe they should not rush to upgrade an operating system the moment Microsoft releases it – and for good reason. The company has a history of making products available before all the bugs are worked out and using the public as their unpaid testers. Often those human guinea pigs endure considerable inconvenience and multiple patches to their “new” operating system before they find satisfaction and contentment.



Once over the hump, products like Windows 98 SE (Second Edition), Windows XP, Windows 7 and Windows 10 proved successful and well-received. But, some of Microsoft’s operating systems never managed to meet with widespread approval. The “blue screen of death” and other anomalies hindered workplace productivity. Microsoft Windows versions that many users would agree never lived up to expectations would include Window ME (Millennial Edition), Windows VISTA, and Windows 8. It’s still a bit too early to tell into which camp Windows 11 will fall.

Microsoft’s Web site indicates that Windows 10 will continue to be supported until at least October 14, 2025, with quality and security updates provided for Windows 10 users until then. There is no need to rush to upgrade!

Question: Should our water office upgrade to Windows 11?

For most water offices, my recommendation – the short answer, is: Not Yet! Wait at least six months to one year and see how things go.

Most Windows 10 users with computer equipment less than five years old will upgrade to Windows 11 without difficulty or problem. However, water utilities with Microsoft Windows-based: electronic meter reading systems, computer control, and telemetry systems, multiple computers networked, and computers, printers or other equipment used in their system that are more than five years old, should do a little research into potential problems before upgrading or postpone updating.

Many of the Windows 11 commonly known problems reported upon release have already been fixed: AMD processors losing 15 percent or more performance, missing widgets, inability to type in the search box, etc. Meanwhile, several of the most anticipated new features have not been included, and many reported problems remain unfixed.

Coincidentally, while working on this article, a water office clerk called our support line stating that "...we just upgraded to Windows 11 and now a network printer won't print and programs shared with other office computers across the network will no longer run on workstations!"

When the upgrade screen for Windows 11 popped up boasting of the wonderful new operating system with a \$0 price tag, naturally, the clerk saw no reason not to answer in the affirmative and upgrade. After all, she had upgraded her home computer and had a perfectly fine experience. Of course, her home computer was not on a network sharing printers and software with others. Fortunately, an easy solution came off without a hitch: "Revert to Windows 10", for now.

Windows 11 includes more than two dozen areas of improvements, new features and changes. But, unless one has a need for one of

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the handful of truly great new features in Windows 11, the safest choice for most water offices will be to stay with Windows 10, for now. There is 'plenty of time' to upgrade before October 2025.

Of course, before upgrading ANYTHING - BACKUP anything of importance, just in case. Before seriously considering upgrades to Windows 11 - everyone should contact their software and hardware vendors to ensure Windows 11 compatibility. If the upgrade installs as intended, there is a 10-day window of opportunity, during which, an option to revert to Windows 10 is available.

For the people like my wife who like to have ten things open at once, there's a pretty cool new feature called "Snap Layouts". It allows working with a bunch of open windows that allows one to arrange them in different layouts on the screen and then save that arrangement. Microsoft recommends designing groups of favorite frequently used apps and windows with Snap Layouts. Then, maximize and minimize the entire bunch to the taskbar with the new Snap Groups feature. "One mouse click" – and all favorites open up in the saved configuration.

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: (Basically, a computer from 2017 or newer)

1. TPM 2.0 - (Trusted Platform Module technology). TPM provides hardware-based security functions and is the international standard for microcontrollers dedicated to hardware security to control access to protected data. Nearly all modern CPU chips support TPM and simply require a BIOS setting on the motherboard setup to allow Windows 11 installation. Some motherboards, usually laptops, include a dedicated TPM controller.
2. Intel 8th Gen/AMD Zen+ or better CPU - (Central Processing Unit) Basically, the "brain" of the computer. It does basic math and logical operations and carries out instructions directed by programs.
3. Secure Boot option must be supported by the motherboard. Secure Boot helps a computer resist attacks and infection from malware on startup. Microsoft's website states: "While the requirement to upgrade a Windows 10 device to Windows 11 is only that the PC be Secure Boot capable by having UEFI/BIOS enabled, you may also consider enabling or turning Secure Boot on for better security." (Basically, this means a less than five-year-old computer motherboard that has a setup feature called 'UEFI/BIOS'.)
4. One must have an Internet Connection and have created a Microsoft Account to get the Windows 11 upgrade.

THE PROS:

For Rural Water Districts and Small Municipal Offices with “less than stellar” Internet service, one of the best features of Windows 11 will be much faster updates due to a new, improved background installation mechanism. And Microsoft has promised that Windows updates will now be 40 percent smaller, making the process even more efficient.

Microsoft Windows 11 new or improved features and items:

- ◆ Lots of minor cosmetic and visual changes like the new rounded corners style
- ◆ Snap Layout and Other New Multitasking Features
- ◆ Auto HDR and Dynamic Refresh Rate
- ◆ Microsoft TEAMS improvements
- ◆ Touch Keyboard Improvements
- ◆ Screen Time and Battery Usage
- ◆ Advanced Gesture Controls
- ◆ Snap Assist improvements
- ◆ Redesigned Settings App
- ◆ Faster Windows Updates
- ◆ Minimal Lock Screen
- ◆ Snappy Animations
- ◆ Universal Media Control
- ◆ Teams Chat Integration
- ◆ Wallpapers and Sounds
- ◆ Windows 11 Widgets
- ◆ Clipboard Syncing
- ◆ Focus Sessions
- ◆ ARM Emulation
- ◆ Microsoft Store
- ◆ Context Menu
- ◆ Action Center
- ◆ Voice Typing
- ◆ File Explorer
- ◆ Start Menu
- ◆ Photos (photo editor)
- ◆ Your Phone App
- ◆ MS Office (trial)
- ◆ Media Player
- ◆ MS Paint

Some new features are directed at specific groups of users, such as laptop/tablet users or gamers. Laptop and tablet users might like the new Touch Keyboard Improvements that replaced the old Tablet Mode. Laptop and tablet users will particularly enjoy the more informative new ‘Screen Time and Battery Usage’ feature.

Some new features may require high-performance Video Graphics Cards or newer faster hard drives than the traditional SATA (Serial Advanced Technology Attachment) drives. SSD (Solid State Drive) or NVMe (Nonvolatile Memory Express) with 1TB minimum space available are recommended for best performance. Also, RAM (Random Access Memory) can be an issue with features that need, or at least run more efficiently with more than the 8gb or 16gb of RAM that is common on many computers in use today.

My favorite improvements? They include Snap Layouts, easier setup of multiple webcams, mics and headsets, easier improved Microsoft Teams video meetings and chat support, the touch keyboard improvements, and faster shutdown and restart. I like some of the cosmetic changes – others, not so much.

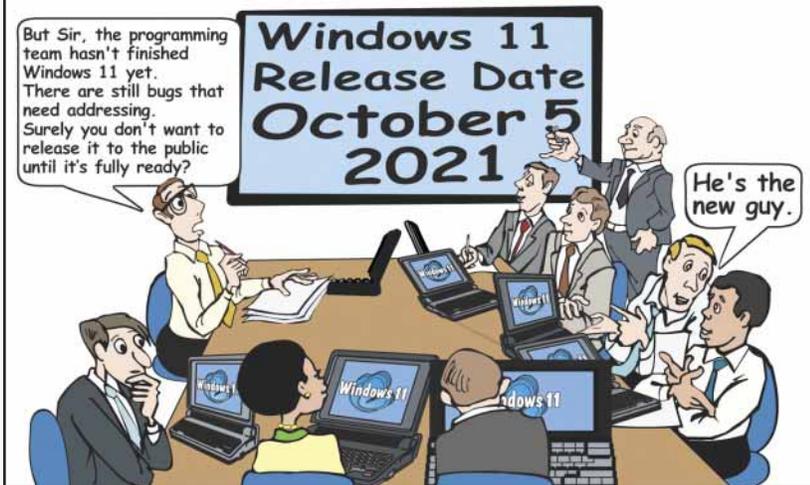
I thought of a particular city clerk who suffers from rheumatoid arthritis in her hands when I learned of the improved voice recognition feature: “Voice Typing” allows for dictation using a microphone to create documents with automatic punctuation.

THE CONS:

1. Error messages when attempting to upgrade, falsely stating the computer is not compatible. A simple setting change, as described in the “System Requirements” earlier in this article is sometimes all that is required to handle this.
2. Windows 11 will have yearly feature updates instead of twice a year, as before. So, it may be a longer wait until removed features may be reinstated or new features added.
3. Microsoft has announced that Windows 11 installs on systems that don’t meet the minimum requirements will not be guaranteed updates and security patches.
4. Removal of several popular features users were accustomed to from Windows 7 and 10 . . .
 - a. Less customizable start menu and missing live tiles
 - b. Less customizable taskbar – can only change the alignment or order of the icons
 - c. Less functional/integratable calendar
 - d. Missing previous features: such as drag and drop files to the taskbarIt could be that over time we may see Microsoft reinstate some of the features users find missing at customer request.
5. Windows 11 has the same Taskbar, Start Menu and File Explorer as Windows 10, but with new unfamiliar layouts, icons and navigation menus. It takes a little time to become familiar with the new Icons replacing common basic tasks previously listed on the menus.

The first thing I did was change the new Windows 11 taskbar icons' settings from centered to left-aligned, as I had been used to using in all previous Windows versions. To me, it just seemed an example of a lot of the changes that seem to be “change for change’s sake”, not a change that actually makes things better.

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Several of the stated new Windows 11 features are not yet available:

1. Direct Storage – an exciting feature popular with gamers on the Xbox platform that allows game quick launch and quick restores.

Graphics by Linda Windler

2. Support for Android Mobile apps and syncing those apps with the Windows 11 desktop.

We can expect that at some future date, Microsoft will release a Windows 11 update that includes the advertised new features that weren't ready upon release and hopefully fixes for bugs yet not addressed.

Time will tell which of these new features may be of benefit to water offices. I personally think some of the new features are terrific; others, I'm not too thrilled about, and still others – well, they may just take a little time getting used to. Upgrade or put off upgrading for a while. Either way, I hope this information is helpful in making that decision.

Merle Windler and his wife Linda are owners of Thoroughbred Systems, Topeka. The company specializes in software solutions for utilities and municipalities, computer networking and associated training. Contact: merlewindler@yahoo.com



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