

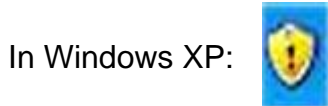
From the TechnoManor

Last week was “Patch Tuesday” for your Windows PC!

Huh? Wait a minute, Mardi Gras isn't for another week.

Ok, so what am I jabbering about?

Did you happen to see one of these icons in the lower right on your computer last week?



These appear whenever Microsoft has updates for Microsoft programs on your computer. They indicate the updates are being downloaded now, or have finished downloading and will be installed soon.

I'll talk about what you should do in a few moments. Let me back up and give a bigger picture.

A Bigger Picture

Ok, we all know computer programs have bugs. Some of these bugs are mere annoyances, others prevent programs from working, and yet another kind actually invite spyware and viruses into your computer. Microsoft does fix most of these bugs, but faces the problem of how to get the fixes to your computer.

In 1998, Microsoft created a web site, Windows Update, that allowed you to download fixes to Windows. A good idea, but it had issues (like how do you remember to keep doing this?).

In 2000, Microsoft included a program called Automatic Updates in its versions of Windows. This program contacts Microsoft, about once a day, and asks, “got anything for me?” Automatic Updates runs behind the scenes. If Microsoft has a fix for your computer, called an *update*, the fix is downloaded from Microsoft and installed in your computer. It fixes the problem in a Microsoft program (sometimes within Windows itself), often closing a hole used by spyware and viruses.

Meanwhile, back at Microsoft, it used to be that whenever someone had a fix for one of Microsoft's programs, they would send it out anytime during the month. This would confuse people and wreck havoc with corporate computers, because the computers would be restarting at unpredictable times.

After a lot of pressure, Microsoft wized up and said, “ok, we'll only send out the fixes once a month.” They chose the 2nd Tuesday for this to happen. So, starting on the 2nd Tuesday of every month, when your Windows PC asks Microsoft, “got anything for me?” it will start receiving those fixes to Microsoft programs. Within the next 24 – 48 hours, your computer will declare it has all the fixes and will apply them, usually in the middle of the night. Typically, Windows must then restart to finish the update process.

This 2nd Tuesday of every month is now known as “Patch Tuesday” by techies and the popular press.

Ok, so what should you do?

So, what should you do? Basically, nothing. Leave the driving to Microsoft.

If you leave your computer running all the time (like I do), when you see one of the above icons in the lower right, expect that your computer will be restarted during the night. You should save important files and close open programs before going to bed. You wouldn't want a Windows restart to put the kibosh on that important letter, would you?

If you typically turn off your computer at night, don't be surprised if you see a message about installing updates before turning off your computer. Go ahead and install those updates. The computer should power itself off after the updates are installed.

And if you're curious, these updates from Microsoft are free. Microsoft is trying to be a good corporate citizen here.

What happens if you never see the above icons, your computer never mentions it has updates to Windows, or your computer never restarts itself during the night? Well, I would be suspicious. Yes, you can turn off the Automatic Updates feature in Windows, but that's a bad idea.

You see, one of the ways that your computer is protected when on the Internet is by fixing buggy programs that Web sites (or virus-infected email) can take advantage of. One of the signs that you may have an infected computer is to discover that Automatic Updates has been turned off.

How do you make sure Automatic Updates is running? Follow these steps:

In Windows XP

- Right mouse click **My Computer** on your Desktop.

(If **My Computer** isn't on your Desktop, click **Start**, then right mouse click **My Computer**.)
- Click **Properties**.
- Click the **Automatic Updates** tab.
- Make sure **Automatic (recommended)** is selected.

In Windows Vista

- Click the Start circle.
 - Type **Windows Update** in the Start Search box.
 - Click **Windows Update** in the results list.
 - Click **Change settings** in the left column.
 - Verify that the option beneath **Important updates** is: **Install updates automatically (recommended)**.
- If a different option appears, someone or something has fiddled with your computer.
- Click **OK**.

If any other option is selected, someone or something has fiddled with your computer.

- Click **OK**.

What if something goes wrong?

Most of the time, updates are installed, your computer is restarted, and Windows works normally.

Every once in a while the updates fail, or the patched version of Windows behaves badly. I personally haven't seen this...and there are six computers on our home network. If it does happen, don't panic. You need to run System Restore to back out the changes. I describe using System Restore in my September 25, 2008 article. Look for a restore point made at around 3 AM with a description of something like *Software Distribution Service* or *Windows Update*.

After you back out the changes, you need to discover what went wrong. This may involve finding a computer savvy friend to look over your computer to see what might be causing the problem.

And on that note, may all your future Patch Tuesdays be quiet and uneventful!

Let's see, it's 5 o'clock. The greyhounds haven't pestered me for dinner, yet. Before they do, ya better send me your technical questions. I can be reached at

frenchygrey@gmail.com

I'll answer one question each week in *The Link*. That is, if the woofs let me!

Dave Gillen