

This hard drive is hardened to disasters

March 4 2009, By Craig Crossman

Anyone who has been reading my column or listening to my radio talk show "Computer America" knows I have been preaching the back-up mantra for years. If I ever decide to have a bumper sticker on my car, it will read: "It's not IF your hard drive will fail, it's WHEN it will fail" - which would make for a really long bumper sticker or one with lettering so small as to encourage tailgating to read it.

But whatever the case, the technology behind magnetic hard drives remains basically the same. Their capacities and speeds have improved almost geometrically over the past few years with the latest crop sporting multi-terabyte capacities. But their reliability has pretty much remained the same.

I'm also an advocate of offsite back-ups. You can back up your hard drive all day long, but what happens if there's a fire or flood at your location? Once again, the data residing on your hard drive is in danger of being lost or destroyed just as surely as a hard drive failure. Backing up to an offsite location insures the safety of your information. Yet there are those who remain uncomfortable sending their data out into the cloud, despite the assurances of privacy, safety and security by the companies that provide these offsite back-up services. So let me offer you yet another alternative to back-up safety.

Just introduced at January's Consumer Electronics Show, the ioSafe Solo external hard drive with disaster protection was created to offer a different kind of data protection not found in today's hard drive offerings in that it protects from fire and flood. Basically, the ioSafe

Solo is an external hard drive that connects to any computer via the USB port.

Currently the Solo is being offered in 500 gigabyte, 1 and 1.5 terabyte capacities with larger offerings just around the corner. What makes the ioSafe stand out in the sea of other external hard drives is that the company has made it pretty much indestructible compared to any other run-of-the-mill external hard drive.

According to ioSafe, the Solo is able to withstand fires and is rated up to 1,550 degrees Fahrenheit per the ASTM E119 industry standard. ASTM is one of the largest voluntary standards development organizations in the world and is a trusted source for technical standards regarding materials, products, systems and services. The E119 is a test method that is intended to evaluate the duration for which elements contain a fire, retain their structural integrity, or exhibit both properties during a predetermined test exposure.

In the case of the Solo, we're looking at how long it can stand up to a fire and protect the hard drive inside its casing, along with the data stored on it. According to ioSafe, their extreme heat protection is provided by a proprietary DataCast endothermic insulation technology. Endothermic insulation uses trapped water molecules to maintain internal heat temperatures at just above 200 degrees F while outside temperatures can reach a searing 1,550 degrees F.

Also according to ioSafe, the Solo can be submerged in fresh or salt water for 3 days at a depth down to 10 feet. Both of these conditions of fire and water certainly meet or exceed anything that a natural disaster such as a hurricane or building fire can throw at it. According to one of my correspondents at CES who observed a demonstration of the Solo's protection, it was first hooked to a computer and data copied to it. After its removal, it was then subjected to fire and water torture. Gasoline was

poured over the Solo, ignited and left to burn for several minutes followed by a thorough dousing of water blasted from a high-pressure fire hose to extinguish the flames. The Solo was then cracked open and the hard drive removed. Connection to the computer revealed all of the data to be safe and retrievable. It was a very impressive demonstration.

The 1.5 terabyte model sells for \$399.98. Comparable capacity drives are in the same price range, which means ioSafe isn't soaking you for the added protection. In fact, I'd say the Solo is one hot deal. Check one out before you buy your next external hard drive.

(Craig Crossman is a national newspaper columnist writing about computers and technology)

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