What the Tech?!: Case Maintenance
by Joe McCormick

Keeping your computer clean is one of the most important aspects of owning one. Just like a car, if you don't maintain it, it's going to break down someday. Computers can basically run forever, if you treat them right, so you might as well put in some effort if you're going to own one. I'll show you how to keep the inside of your computer case safe from dust build up.

Cleaning the inside of your computer will really help against any potential malfunctions. Dust builds up due to the constant flow of air, and if it becomes too much it could clog up a fan or trap enough heat to cause some real damage to the electrical parts. This process is the easiest, most cost effective solution to keeping your computer in operation.

Computer cases differ, but getting any of them open is a breeze. First step, remove all the cables from the back of the case; some plugs pull right out, some are screwed in and need to be undone. Pay attention and avoid damage. When taking off the side of a computer case, make sure you know which side you're removing. On the back of your computer, you'll notice that all the plugs are positioned to the left side. You want to remove the right side.

Latched computers are the easiest to open; simply pull on the latch, slide the panel backwards, and lift it off. Older cases, the kind that are screwed to the back, aren't any more difficult to open. Instead of a latch, you have screws; just unscrew the screws, slide the side of the case back, and lift it off. After you've done this, lay the computer down so that the side you just removed is facing towards the sky. You should see a bunch of wires and the motherboard, a large green or black plastic board that everything is attached to.

Now comes the fun part. You're going to make sure you're outside for this, as it's going to get very dusty, based on how long it's been since you've cleaned. Basically, a can of air is your best friend. All you have to do is attach the straw to the can of air, put it about 1 inch from the motherboard and spray all over. If you have to, lift the top of your computer so it's at an angle, allowing the dust balls to roll out. Continue to do this until you don't see any more dust stirring. It helps to do this in sunlight as the lack of dust is easier to see.

After it's all cleaned, just reverse the process. Fit the teeth of the case's side into the corresponding holes on the case itself. Once the side is flush with the top and bottom of the case, gently slide the side forward until it meets with the front of the case. Make sure all of the teeth are correctly aligned or you could risk damaging the case. Replace any screws.

Most all cables are color coordinated. If they aren't, pay attention to the shape of extension, and know that USB cables can go in any USB slot. With VGA/DVI video cables, you need to be very sure that they are positioned properly. Look at the inside of the cable extension, and make sure it matches up to the input on your computer case. If you insert these cables incorrectly, you risk bending some or all of the cable's pins, effectively ruining the cable.

This whole process may sound daunting, but it really isn't. It takes the same amount of care as any other project with many parts. Just pay attention to what your doing and you'll come out on top. If you can't clean it yourself, get someone else to. You don't want to neglect your computer case; it is the ocean in which your information swims. Don't pollute the ocean.

Have question for What the Tech?! Email us at wtt.globe@gmail.com.