3 ways to protect your laptop on the road

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The newest laptops are powerful, light, and thin enough to fit easily into the slenderest of carry-on baggage. This makes them a great accessory for flying or any other mode of travel, but also easier to lose or have stolen.

It pays to be extra vigilant at airport security checkpoints where thieves know people can be flustered.

You should also store your laptop in the seat in front of you, instead of in the overhead compartment when you fly.

But even if you're extra careful, it's still possible to lose your laptop. If you spend some time securing your laptop before you go on the road, you could help keep your personal or financial information from falling into the wrong

Here are our top tips to help you secure the information on your laptop.

1	**Protect your information** If you keep a lot of personal or financial information on your computer, invest in an operating system that includes file protection. Windows Vista and Windows XP Professional have the tools to protect your information through a process called encryption. To learn more, see Encrypt Your Data to Keep It Safe .
2	**Protect your laptop with a strong password** If you travel with your laptop frequently, you should secure it with a strong password. Check your computer's Help and Support service to learn how to add or change your system password. To find out how to create passwords that are tough for hackers to crack, but easy for you to remember, see Strong passwords: How to create and use them.
3	**Back up before you go** Always back up your information before you take your laptop on a trip. You can't always avoid the financial loss of your equipment, but you can avoid losing all your information in the process. To learn how to make copies of all of your information using Windows XP, see How to back up manually or by using the Windows XP Backup utility. For Windows Vista, see Windows Vista: Windows Backup. If you use Windows Live OneCare, see Windows Live OneCare Backup and Restore.

Related Links

- Use public wireless networks more safely

- 5 safety tips for using a public computer

- How to protect your laptop from thieves

To open embedded links hold down the Ctrl Key, while clicking on the link.

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Help keep your data safe

## Encrypt your data with Windows XP Professional

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You are a business consultant and are constantly on the move. You take your laptop with you everywhere—to customer sites, on business trips, and even on vacation. Maintaining the privacy of your clients' confidential data is critical to the success of your business and your reputation. You already have a firewall and antivirus software installed on your computer, but these only protect you from attacks on the Internet. What happens to your confidential files if your laptop is lost or stolen? Losing your computer doesn't have to mean losing your privacy. With Windows XP Professional, you can help protect private customer and financial information by using its Encrypting File System (EFS).

When you encrypt a file or folder, you are converting it to a format that can't be read by other people. A file encryption key is added to files or folders that you choose to encrypt. This key is needed to read the file. Windows XP Professional makes the encryption and decryption process easy—simply follow the steps below to encrypt your files or folders. When you are logged on to your computer, you'll be able to read them. Anyone who tries to use your computer without your logon will not be able to read them.
Note: Make sure you have your computer set up so that you have to log on to use it (when you start up, or when you have been away from the computer for a little while). If the computer is stolen when you're logged in, your encrypted files will be readable.

To encrypt a file or folder

1. Click **Start**, point to **All Programs**, point to **Accessories**, and then click **Windows Explorer**.

2. Right–click the file or folder that you want to encrypt, and then click **Properties**.

3. On the **General** tab, click **Advanced**.

4. Select the **Encrypt contents to secure data** check box.
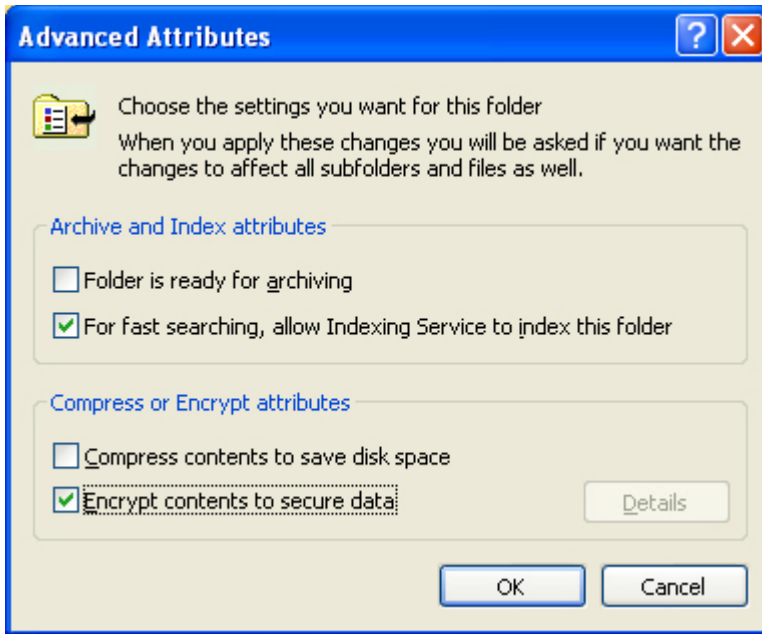
Note: Files or folders that are compressed cannot also be encrypted. If you encrypt a compressed file or folder, that file or folder will be uncompressed.

If you have chosen to encrypt a single file, you can also choose to encrypt the folder that contains it. Select **Encrypt the file and the parent folder** in the Encryption Warning dialog window. All files created in the encrypted folder will now be automatically encrypted.

If you encrypt a folder instead of a single file, you can choose to encrypt all the contents of the folder as well.
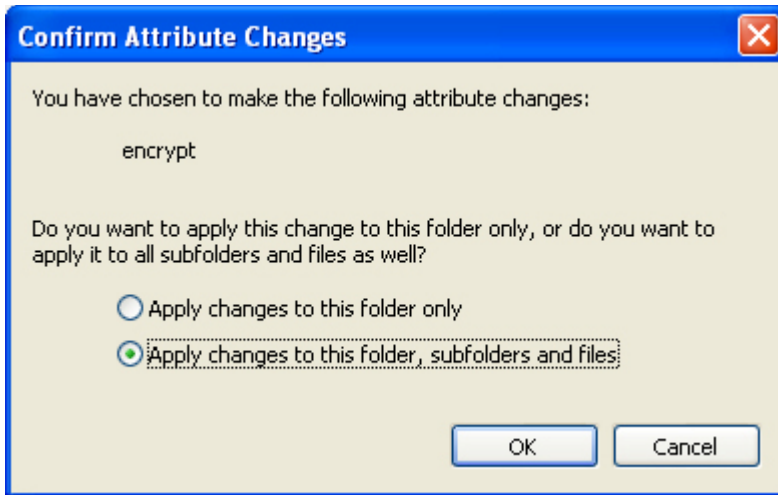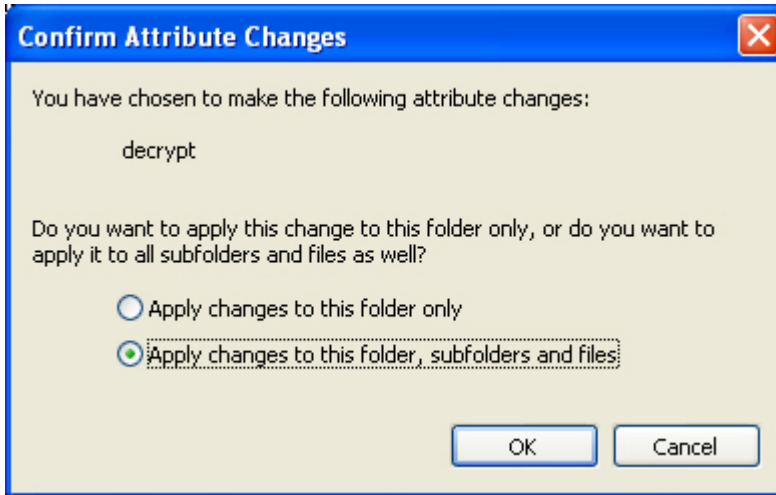
To decrypt a file or folder

1. Click **Start**, point to **All Programs**, point to **Accessories**, and then click **Windows Explorer**.

2. Right–click the file or folder that you want to encrypt, and then click **Properties**.

3. On the **General** tab, click **Advanced**.

4. Clear the **Encrypt contents to secure data** check box.

When you decrypt a folder, you must decide whether to decrypt the folder only or to decrypt the folder and all files and subfolders contained in the folder. If you choose to decrypt the folder only, the files and subfolders within the folder remain encrypted. However, when you add new files and subfolders to the folder, they will not be automatically

encrypted.

Remember, anyone who accesses your computer will also be able to access a decrypted file or folder. Windows XP Professional gives you the power to help keep your files and folders safe from unauthorized access. Use Windows XP Professional to encrypt important information on your computer and help keep your data safe.

Other free Encryption Tools provided by TAMU ITIM - http://itim.tamu.edu/encryption/

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