

PRODUCT REVIEWS

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Encryption Plus offers modest encryption protection for hard drives

By Joe Peschel

Encryption Plus for Hard Disks 4.02 is PC Guardian's newest solution for protecting confidential data on hard drives. The idea behind the utility is simple: If a thief steals your notebook, he has to crack the password protection to access any data, because the product can encrypt entire drives. You can also use the utility on desktop PCs.

Encryption Plus may stop most thieves and typical hackers from accessing your hard disk, but I don't believe it will deter determined attackers. To protect highly sensitive data, I recommend instead Symantec's For Your Eyes Only or, for individual file encryption, Brigg's Software's Puffer.

PC Guardian officials have said the product uses Blowfish, a strong encryption algorithm, but with a 40-bit key. I

could not find any mention of Blowfish, however, in the manual or the help file.

During installation Encryption Plus requires you to enter a privacy code, a master password, and a daily password. The daily password is for ordinary access. The other two passwords are to be used in case of an emergency, such as to issue a one-time password for a forgetful user, and to grant supervisor access. You can also create an emergency access disk to deal with disk problems if they arise.

Strangely enough, none of the passwords are case sensitive. It's also unusual that the master password must be exactly eight characters, which may be susceptible to a brute-force attack. The daily password must contain at least six characters, which poses another possible weakness,

because most users will likely choose the minimum requirement.

When you install the product it encrypts entire logical drives of your choice. If you have more than one logical drive, I suggest that you encrypt all of them, or at least the boot drive, to block an easy route to attacking the protected drive. Also, you can share encrypted files with other Encryption Plus users.

Installing Encryption Plus for Hard Disks on my 200MB hard drive with its 100MB of data took approximately 1 hour. When the system rebooted, I was greeted with a prompt to enter my password. Naturally, any of the three passwords worked.

Attempting to access the disk by booting from the A: drive and switching to the C: drive yielded garbage.

As I said, this utility will keep out most hackers. However, if your data is invaluable, you may want to look elsewhere for protection.

Joe Peschel, a free-lance computer journalist, covers security programs and other utilities for stand-alone systems. He can be reached at jpeschel@aol.com.

THE BOTTOM LINE: OKAY

Encryption Plus for Hard Disks 4.02

This utility may foil an ordinary thief, but don't count on it to protect invaluable information.

Pros: Encrypts entire disk fairly fast; will thwart ordinary interlopers.

Cons: No documentation on the encryption algorithm used; program isn't crack-proof.

PC Guardian, San Rafael, Calif.; (800) 288-8126, (415) 459-0190; fax: (415) 459-1162; pcg@pcguardianmail.com; <http://www.pcguardian.com>.

Price: \$129.95

Platforms: Windows 3.1, Windows 95. (Windows NT version coming soon.)

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