



encryption

PC GUARDIAN ENCRYPTION PLUS

Protect your privacy with strong encryption for hard disks, files and folders

Minimum requirements Encryption Plus for Hard Disks: WinNT (Pentium)/Win9x. Single physical hard drive. FAT16/32. Encryption Plus Personal: Win9x/NT. Encryption Plus for Folders: Win9x/NT (Enterprise version – reviewed); Win9x only (other versions – not reviewed)
Tested on AMD K6 200MHz and Intel Celeron 366MHz, 64MB RAM, Win95/98
Extra information Encryption Plus for Hard Disks: £82 (£70 ex VAT); Encryption Plus Personal: £44 (£38 ex VAT); Encryption Plus for Folders (Enterprise): £82 (£70 ex VAT); Encryption Plus for Folders (Single User): £59 (£50 ex VAT)

The most valuable thing inside most computers is the data. Backups insure against accidents but unauthorised access is trickier to police. A BIOS password isn't much help if the hard drive can be transplanted to another PC and Windows' own password protection is even easier for sneaks to deal with.

Real security begins when files are encoded so that only password holders can unscramble them. No version of Windows offers such protection, apart from Win2000 with its Encrypting File System for NTFS. The PC Guardian products reviewed here aim to fill that gap in Win95/98 and NT.

There are other packages in the range which we haven't tested but which may interest you, including a system for protecting CD-ROMs, and an e-mail add-on for MS Outlook and Lotus Notes.

Encryption Plus for Hard Disks

EPHD protects a drive by encrypting its contents with the Blowfish algorithm at 56-bit strength

After loading on to the administrator's machine, it is used to generate packages for other PCs. When installed on the target computers, you gain the option to encrypt their disks. After this, a password is requested before the operating system is allowed to load. All your software works as normal, oblivious to the encryption engine encoding and decoding data on its way to and from the drive.

When driving user packages, there are options to configure how passwords are handled. Following accepted good practice, these include specifying minimum password length, special characters that must be included, how long a password remains valid and so on.

A disciplined backup regime is essential even though EPHD has basic tools to help if things go wrong with a drive. Disk recovery software might work but adding complexity to the disk sub-system must increase the risk of problems, as happened to us when we failed to read what the manual says about Win98/NT dual-booting. We did the wrong thing and ended up having to reformat a Win98 partition. It was our fault for not reading the instructions, but we feel that EPHD should be better idiot-proofed.

EPHD's significant limitation is that it will not work if more than one physical hard drive is fitted,



The Hunting of the Snark, turned into utter nonsense with Blowfish encryption.

even though it handles multiple partitions. An upgrade is expected this summer to make EPHD Win2000 compatible. Performance didn't suffer unduly and defragmentation and virus protection seemed unaffected.

EPHD is a good solution where privacy is of paramount importance.

Encryption Plus Personal

This is a separate product that Blowfishes individual folders or files. To encrypt or decrypt, you run the application, pick the item and it's done. There is no on-the-fly processing.

This program would be okay for guarding data sent over the Internet, for example, but it is easy to forget to re-encrypt a file and we wouldn't rely on it for everyday security.

Encryption Plus for Folders

Encryption Plus for Folders provides on-the-fly encryption on hard disks and removable media. The Enterprise version we tested operates much like EPHD in the way user packages are generated from an administrative installation. Password

The password options in Encryption Plus for Hard Disks offer administrators plenty of flexibility.



To protect a folder in Eplus-Folders you just add it to the list on the right.



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options are similar and there are refinements such as whether you allow network sharing of encrypted folders.

Users log in at start-up (this can be unified with the network log-in) to enable access to protected folders. The program will not encrypt folders it thinks may affect system stability, which means the Windows folder and everything in the Program Files hierarchy. It will encrypt a program folder installed elsewhere, but expect performance to drop.

We protected a folder and rebooted without logging in. Access to the folder was denied, whichever way we tried. We then rebooted to MS-DOS and were shocked to find a test file unencrypted. This phenomenon turned out to be confined to very short files, for example one or two words. Anything longer is fully scrambled.

Many will consider this unacceptable – a short file might contain a password – and performance marks have been deducted accordingly. It's worrying that something like this can get out of the door without at least being documented. We didn't test for other potential holes such as data being left in the Windows swap file and temporary files.

If these real and potential limitations fall below your security requirements you need to consider whole-disk encryption. Eplus-Folders seems to work well otherwise.

Ian Sharpe

PC Plus

VERDICT

ENCRYPTION PLUS FOR HARD DISKS

For Serious bolt-on security for Windows PCs. Good administrative control
Against Not compatible with Win2000. Not completely idiot proof

Range of features.....8
Ease of use.....8
Documentation.....8
Performance.....9
Value for money.....7

ENCRYPTION PLUS FOR FOLDERS

For Lighter solution than full hard disk encryption. Good flexibility and administrative control
Against Not quite so secure

Range of features.....8
Ease of use.....8
Documentation.....8
Performance.....5
Value for money.....7

ENCRYPTION PLUS PERSONAL V2.01

For A simple, uninvasive program for light use
Against Easy to forget to re-encrypt a program

Range of features.....4
Ease of use.....9
Documentation.....8
Performance.....8
Value for money.....5

8/10

6/10

5/10