



An Extended Guide · No. 1815

Common UPS Mistakes to Avoid

A short list of slip-ups
— each with a simple fix

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! Read this first — what a UPS can and can't do

First, the honest picture, so a UPS never disappoints you. A UPS — an uninterruptible power supply — is a battery backup box. When the power blinks or goes out, it keeps small electronics like your computer, your modem and router, or a medical monitor running without a flicker. But it is a short bridge, not a whole-home generator: it buys you minutes, not hours — time to save your work and shut down gently, keep the internet up through a brief blip, or ride you over until a generator or a portable power station takes over. Plug only small electronics into the battery side. Never plug in a laser printer, a space heater, a hair dryer, a microwave, a sump pump, or anything that makes heat or has a big motor — they draw far too much and can overload or damage the unit. A UPS has a sealed battery inside, so set it where a little warmth can escape, not sealed in a cabinet, and keep it dry. That battery wears out every few years and gets swapped and recycled at a battery drop-off — never put it in the household trash. Most UPS trouble comes from a handful of avoidable mistakes. This guide gathers them in one place — each with a simple fix.

The mistakes to avoid — and their easy fixes

A UPS is a simple, forgiving gadget, but a few common slip-ups trip folks up again and again. Learn this short list and you'll sidestep nearly every UPS headache before it starts.

I'm Bill, from Bill's Home Tech in Portage County, Ohio. I've seen the same handful of mistakes over and over — and the good news is that each one has a quick, painless fix. Consider this your 'what not to do' cheat sheet.

Every mistake here is drawn from the rest of this series, so if one hits home, there's a whole guide waiting to help. Let's run through them.

★ Learn from others' slip-ups

You don't have to make these mistakes to learn from them. Skim the list, fix any that apply to you, and call me at (330) 200-8042 if you'd like a hand.

The top mistakes, on one page

If you read nothing else, don't do these.

- ❑ Don't plug a laser printer, heater, or motor into the battery side.
- ❑ Don't leave the computer on a surge-only outlet — it'll die in an outage.
- ❑ Don't skip the shutdown-software cable for an unattended PC or NAS.
- ❑ Don't forget a link in the internet chain (like the fiber box).
- ❑ Don't ignore the replace-battery warning, or store it unplugged.
- ❑ Don't expect a UPS to run for hours, or treat it as a file backup.

✓ Most fixes take a minute

Nearly every item here is fixed by moving a plug, pressing a button, or ordering a battery. Small fixes, big payoff.

Mistake: the wrong things on the battery side

The number-one cause of a tripping UPS.

Plugging a laser printer, a space heater, a hair dryer, or anything with a big motor into the battery outlets can overload a UPS in an instant — even one that easily handles your computer. The fix is simple: keep only small electronics on the battery side, and put printers and chargers on the surge outlets. Anything that makes heat or has a motor goes in a wall outlet, never the UPS.

! The fix: small electronics only

If it makes heat or has a big motor, it doesn't belong on a UPS. Our 'what to plug into a UPS' guide has the full green and red lists.

Mistake: the computer on a surge-only outlet

A sneaky one that makes a good UPS look useless.

Many UPS units split their outlets into battery-backup and surge-only. Plug your computer into a surge-only outlet by mistake, and it will shut right off in an outage — leaving you to wonder why the UPS 'didn't work.' It worked fine; the plug was just in the wrong hole. The fix is to move your must-stay-on gear to the battery outlets.

✓ The fix: read the labels

Check that the computer and internet are in the battery-backup outlets, not the surge-only ones. Our 'battery vs surge outlets' guide shows how to tell them apart.

Mistake: skipping the shutdown cable

Leaving half the protection in the box.

A UPS gives your computer minutes to shut down — but only if someone's there to do it. Skip the shutdown-software cable, and an outage while you're out simply drains the battery and crashes the machine anyway. The fix is to plug in that cable and set up the free software, so the computer saves your work and shuts down on its own.

✓ The fix: connect and set it up

That cable in the box completes the protection. Our 'automatic safe-shutdown software' guide walks through it — especially important for a NAS.

Mistake: forgetting a link in the internet chain

Powering most of the chain, but not all of it.

To keep the internet up, every box between the wall and your Wi-Fi must stay powered — and folks often power the router but forget the fiber box (ONT) or a small network switch. Miss one, and the whole connection drops despite your UPS. The fix is to power every box in the chain: modem, router, fiber box, and any switch or main mesh unit.

! The fix: power the whole chain

Trace the path the internet takes into your home and put every box on the UPS. Our 'keep your internet up' guide maps it out.

Mistake: daisy-chaining power strips

A tangle that defeats the protection and risks a fire.

Plugging a UPS into a power strip, or a power strip into the UPS's battery outlets, can overload things, undo the protection, and even be a fire hazard. The fix is simple: give the UPS its own wall outlet and plug your gear straight into it. If you're short on outlets, the answer is a UPS with enough of them — not a chain of strips.

! The fix: its own wall outlet

One UPS, one wall outlet, gear plugged straight in. Never chain strips or run it through a long extension cord.

Mistake: a hot, sealed, or damp spot

The quiet mistake that halves a battery's life.

Tucking a UPS into a sealed cabinet, a hot attic, a freezing garage, or onto a damp floor wears the battery out early — heat and extremes are its worst enemies. The fix costs nothing: give it a cool, dry, breathable spot at comfortable room temperature, with a little air around it, off any damp floor.

✓ The fix: cool, dry, breathable

A good spot can add years to the battery. Our 'where to place a UPS' guide covers heat and airflow in full.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

Everyone makes some of these, but a few bite town and country folks differently.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town or the suburbs, with frequent short outages, the mistakes that bite are usually the plug-in ones.

- The computer on a surge-only outlet — caught out by every short blink.
- A laser printer on the battery, tripping the UPS.
- An old surge strip trusted for years past its protection.
- Skipping the shutdown cable when outages hit while you're out.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country on a private well, with longer outages, the runtime and readiness mistakes hurt most.

- Expecting a UPS to run for hours, instead of bridging to a generator.
- Ignoring a replace-battery warning, then facing a long outage on a tired battery.
- Not keeping a spare battery when stores are far off.
- Forgetting to keep the phone chain powered where help is farther away.

★ Want a quick sanity check on your setup?

I'll look over how your UPS is set up and catch any of these before they catch you. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

Mistake: ignoring the replace-battery warning

Silencing the one message you most need to act on.

When a UPS signals that its battery is worn out — a light, a beep — muting it and carrying on leaves you with a UPS that may give almost no runtime in the next outage. The fix is to order a matching battery and swap it; it's easy and inexpensive, and it brings the UPS right back. Don't let a solved-in-five-minutes problem leave you unprotected.

✓ The fix: replace it promptly

A replace-battery warning is honesty, not a nuisance. Our 'replacing the battery' guide makes the swap simple — and covers recycling the old one.

Mistake: overloading with no headroom

Loading a UPS right to its edge.

Piling gear onto the battery side until the UPS is near its limit leaves it straining, gives you almost no runtime, and can trip it under a small surge. The fix is to keep the battery side to your true essentials and choose a UPS with room to spare, so it loafs along rather than struggling.

✓ The fix: leave a cushion

Size with headroom and keep the battery side lean. Our 'sizing' and 'VA vs watts' guides show how to leave the right cushion.

Mistake: expecting a UPS to run for hours

Asking a bridge to be a highway.

A UPS holds minutes, not hours — it's built to bridge a blip and cover a graceful shutdown, not to run your gear through a long outage. Expecting more only leads to disappointment. The fix is to match the tool to the job: a UPS for the instant catch, and a power station or generator for the long haul, with the UPS handing off to them.

! The fix: bridge to bigger backup

If you want hours, pair the UPS with a power station or generator. Our 'UPS vs power station' and 'extending runtime' guides show the hand-off.

Mistake: treating a UPS as a backup

Confusing backup power with backing up your files.

A UPS protects against a power loss, but it can't recover a failed drive, a deleted file, or data lost to fire or theft. Relying on it as your only safety net for precious files is a risk. The fix is to pair the UPS with real backups — several copies, on more than one device, with one kept somewhere else.

! The fix: back up your files too

Backup power and file backups are different jobs. Do both, especially for a NAS or a home business — our NAS guide covers backups.

Mistake: never testing it

Hoping it works instead of knowing it does.

A UPS installed and forgotten might have a tired battery, a plug in the wrong outlet, or software that isn't set — and you'd never know until an outage exposed it. The fix is a one-minute test a couple of times a year: briefly unplug the UPS from the wall and confirm your gear stays on. It turns hope into confidence.

✓ The fix: test on a calm day

A quick unplug test tells you everything's ready. Our 'self-test and maintenance' guide covers the whole light routine.

Mistake: buying on the VA number alone

Shopping by the biggest number on the box.

The big 'VA' number on the front is the headline, but the smaller 'watts' number is the honest limit for your gear. Two units with the same VA can offer different watts. Buy on VA alone and you might get less real capacity than you thought. The fix is to compare the watts figure and make sure it covers your gear with headroom.

✓ The fix: go by watts

Watts is the number that runs your gear. Our 'VA vs watts' guide makes the two numbers friendly and clear.

Mistake: storing it unplugged

Letting the battery quietly ruin itself on a shelf.

A UPS left unplugged for months slowly drains its battery, which can harm it — so the unit you stored 'to save it' comes out worse than it went in. The fix is to leave a UPS plugged in so it stays charged and ready. If you truly must store one, follow the maker's advice on charging it first and topping it up now and then.

✓ The fix: leave it plugged in

A UPS wants to stay powered. Plugged in and charged is how it stays ready — and how the battery stays healthy.

Mistake: over-relying on it for critical needs

The most important one to get right.

A UPS is a helpful layer, but it is never the whole plan for something a life or safety depends on. Relying on a UPS alone for life-sustaining medical equipment, or as your only way to call for help, is a serious mistake. The fix is layers: approved device batteries, spare supplies, a generator, a charged cell phone, the utility medical list, and a plan made with the right professionals.

! The fix: build layers, and call 911 when needed

For medical needs or emergencies, a UPS is one layer among many — never the whole plan. Our medical and home-phone guides cover this with care.

Common Questions

The questions folks ask about avoiding UPS trouble.

Q: What's the most common UPS mistake?

Plugging the wrong thing into the battery side — a laser printer or a heater — which overloads it. A close second is leaving the computer on a surge-only outlet, so it dies in an outage.

Q: My UPS trips for no reason — what's wrong?

Usually it's overloaded: too much, or the wrong thing (like a printer), on the battery outlets. Lighten the load and keep hot or motorized gear off entirely.

Q: Why did my UPS 'die' after a couple of years?

Almost certainly the battery wore out — that's normal. A fresh battery brings it back. Storing it unplugged or in a hot spot can make it happen sooner.

Q: Is a UPS enough to protect my files?

No — it guards against a power blink, not a failed drive or a deleted file. Keep real backups too, especially for a NAS or a business.

Q: How do I know I've set mine up right?

Small electronics only on the battery, computer and internet on the battery outlets, shutdown software set, a cool spot, and a quick test — that's a UPS done right.

★ Want me to check your setup?

I'll spot any of these mistakes and fix them in one visit — and leave you confident it's all correct. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

The don't-do-this list

Everything from this guide, in one list to avoid.

- ❑ Don't put heaters, printers, or motors on the battery side.
- ❑ Don't leave the computer on a surge-only outlet.
- ❑ Don't skip the shutdown cable, or forget a link in the internet chain.
- ❑ Don't chain power strips, or hide the UPS in a hot, sealed, or damp spot.
- ❑ Don't ignore the replace-battery warning, overload it, or store it unplugged.
- ❑ Don't expect hours from it, treat it as a file backup, or lean on it alone for critical needs.

✓ Avoid these, and you're set

This short list of 'don'ts' prevents nearly every UPS headache. Keep it handy when you set one up.

A five-minute fix-it round

Go check these on your UPS right now — most take seconds.

- ❑ Look: is the computer in a battery-backup outlet, not surge-only?
- ❑ Look: is any printer or heater off the battery side?
- ❑ Check: is the shutdown-software cable plugged in and set up?
- ❑ Feel: is the spot cool and breathable, not hot or sealed?
- ❑ Watch: any replace-battery light or short runtime lately?
- ❑ Test: briefly unplug it and confirm your gear stays on.

★ Found something to fix?

If any of these turned up a problem, that's a good thing — now you can fix it before an outage does. Call (330) 200-8042 if you'd like a hand.

Where to go next

You've dodged the mistakes — here's where to go deeper.

- Get the plugs right: 'what to plug in' and 'battery vs surge outlets.'
- Get the size right: 'sizing' and 'VA vs watts.'
- Keep it ready: 'self-test and maintenance' and 'replacing the battery.'
- Ready to shop? Our 'UPS buying checklist' pulls it all together.

Follow whatever question is on your mind. Each guide stands on its own.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made avoiding the most common UPS mistakes feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. Setting up a plug-in UPS is friendly, everyday work I'm glad to do with you; I don't do licensed electrical work myself, so for a hardwired unit or any panel or wiring work I'll help you line up a trustworthy local pro.

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Top Mistakes and Their Fixes

Each one is quick to put right

	The mistake	The fix
Printer on the battery	Move it to surge	
PC on surge-only	Move it to battery	
No shutdown cable	Plug it in, set it up	
Ignoring replace beep	Fit a new battery	
No file backups	Back up too	

Most fixes take a minute — a moved plug or a fresh battery.

Avoid the Big Three

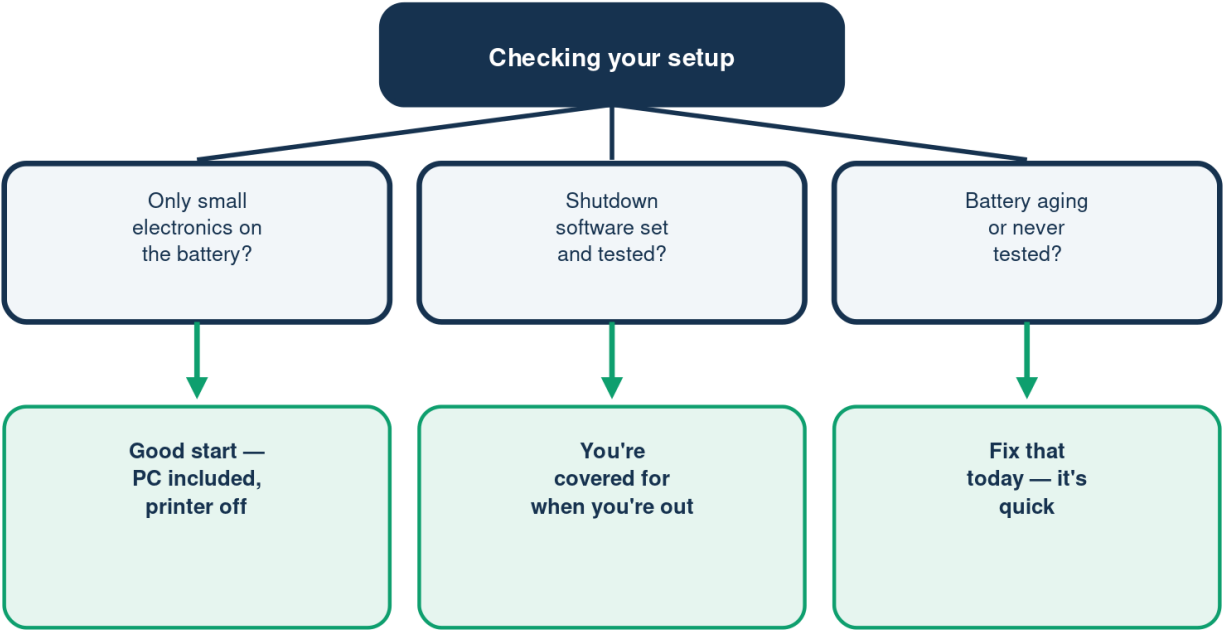
Get these right and you're most of the way there



Right device, right outlet, and tested — the whole game.

Is Your UPS Set Up Right?

A starting point, not the final word



Avoiding a few common mistakes prevents nearly every UPS headache.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

Don't / Do

Swap the habit on the left for the one on the right

	Don't	Do instead
Laser printer on battery	Use a surge outlet	
Expect hours of runtime	Bridge to a generator	
Store it unplugged	Leave it plugged in	
Buy on VA alone	Check the watts	

Small changes in habit, big changes in how well a UPS serves you.



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A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

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