Mysterious loss of Win10 1607 Wi-Fi connections

By Tracey Capen on December 12, 2016 in Field Notes, Top Story, Windows Secrets

Recently, some users of Windows 10 Version 1670 suddenly found that they couldn't connect to the Internet via a Wi-Fi connection. The immediate suspect was a cumulative update released Dec. 9.

The solution for the problem — a system restart — is a reminder of how you can easily access some of Win10's most important troubleshooting tools.

What caused Windows 10 Wi-Fi connections to fail?

A bit of Windows-updating mystery and confusion developed this past week. On Dec. 9, Microsoft released cumulative update KB 3201845 for Win10 Version 1607 (aka Anniversary Update) that included various fixes. About the same time, some users of that OS reported problems connecting to networks via Wi-Fi. The early assumption was that something in KB 3201845 broke wireless connections. However, that assumption was apparently wrong — nor was the update the solution.

A Microsoft Community moderator noted on Dec. 8 that the company was investigating reports of Wi-Fi-connection issues. Annoyingly, there's been no follow-up information in the post. But Microsoft did take the extraordinary step of putting up a banner on its support pages recommending that users restart their systems to clear the problem (see Figure 1; box highlight ours).

Figure 1. Microsoft posted this highly unusual notification on its support pages.

Apparently, some users are having difficulty getting the restart fix to work, possibly due to Win10's Fast Startup function. A series of posts on Woody Leonhard's AskWoody site give some observations and alternate solutions.

Update: Adding to the mystery, late this morning (Dec. 12), Microsoft took down the information page for cumulative update KB 3201845, replacing it with an MS "This page doesn't exist" notification. Some hours later, the page was restored. But we still don't know what caused the Wi-Fi-connection problem.

Using Restart to access advanced troubleshooting

The above use of Restart is a good reminder that it's a fast way to access some of Windows 10's advanced troubleshooting and startup tools. (Note: Before using any of the following options, be sure to close any open applications and documents. Most of the tools will restart Win10 into a limited version of the OS.)

Simply press and hold shift when you click Win10's Restart option. The system will reboot to the Choose an option screen (left). From there, you can continue on to a standard Win10 boot or shut down — or open the troubleshooting tools menus.

Clicking *Troubleshoot* opens two options: *Reset this PC* and *Advanced options*. Win10's two *Reset* versions should be reserved as last resort fixes.

Troubleshoot

Reset this PC
Lets you choose to keep or remove your personal files, and then reinstalls Windows.

Advanced options

Clicking *Advanced options* opens a another window with choices such as system restore, system-image recovery, startup repair, startup settings, and command prompt.

You can also use the "Go back" option to roll back to a previous version of Windows. But if you've had the current version installed for a while, there's a good chance this option won't work.

Advanced options

System Restore
Use a restore point recorded on your PC to restore Windows

System Image Recovery
Recover Windows using a specific system image file

Startup Repair
Fix problems that keep Windows from loading

Command Prompt
Use the Command Prompt for advanced troubleshooting

Startup Settings
Change Windows startup behavior

Go back to the previous build

Startup Settings

Restart to change Windows options such as:

- Enable low-resolution video mode
- Enable debugging mode
- Enable boot logging
- Enable Safe Mode
- Disable driver signature enforcement
- Disable early-launch anti-malware protection
- Disable automatic restart on system failure

The Startup Settings (Left) includes many of the classic troubleshooting tools found in earlier Windows versions. It's here you'll find the option to boot into Safe Mode, another tool Microsoft seems intent on depreciating.

The last three Startup Settings options might not be familiar to many Windows users. One, *Disable early launch anti-malware*, is new to Win8 and Win10. "Early launch anti-malware" is a feature in Secure Boot that allows AV applications to begin malware detection early in the boot process. It's designed to allow detection and blocking of malicious code such as rootkits that might launch during Windows startup. (These forms of malware can be difficult to detect once the startup process is complete.)

Both *Disable driver signature enforcement* and *Disable automatic restart on system failure* date back to XP. Driver signature enforcement is designed to block any unsigned drivers — a possible source of faulty or malicious code. On the other hand, using *Disable driver signature enforcement* lets you install and run any driver, good or bad.

Selecting *Disable automatic restart on system failure* might give you more time to read failure information after events such as a bluescreen of death.

Note that options such as *Reset*, *Advanced startup*, and *Go back to an earlier build* are also accessible more directly via Win10's *Setup/Update & security/Recovery*.

Other *Advanced options* tools are still found in Control Panel and Win10's Settings. And some troubleshooting apps are still located only in Control Panel. For example, the built-in fix-it for Windows Update is in the CP *Troubleshooting* section, even though Windows Update options are in the Win10 Settings menus.

Win10's version of **System Restore** can be confusing. You can access the classic form in Control Panel under the *Backup and Restore (Windows 7)* heading. The version in *Troubleshoot/Advanced options* requires entering a password after it reboots your system (a security feature).

Even when you get to the Restore window, you might well get a message that there are no saved restore points. That's because Win10's System Restore isn't turned on by default. (Microsoft prefers that you use Reset, which has its own significant limitations.)

On my Win10 test system, I was surprised to find that there wasn't a single restore point, even though I'd had the service turned on for a while. To test the system, I created a restore point manually via *Control Panel/System/System protection/Create*, and it did show up when I used the Restore tool in Advanced options.

Windows continues to offer an excellent selection of built-in troubleshooting tools. But with the evolution from Win7 to Win8 to the various iterations of Win10, knowing where to find them is only getting more difficult to remember.