How to activate and use the built-in Windows 10 backup feature

By Mark Kaelin, techrepublic.com, May 22, 2019

Criminal activity targeting personal computers continues to grow at an alarming rate. Even the most basic of back-up systems can prevent future headaches.

According to the annual The Hiscox Cyber Readiness Report 2019, which surveyed 5,400 business professionals, some 61% of respondents reported that their businesses were hit by a cyberattack in the past 12 months. In an era where one careless click of a malicious link can lock you out of your hard drive, backing up your computer's files and important data is imperative and should be standard operating procedure.

While numerous sophisticated back-up applications are available, many taking advantage of network and cloud services, Microsoft Windows 10 offers a built-in back-up feature that is simple to activate and use. The only requirement beyond the built-in application is a viable storage device, which can range from a USB thumb drive to a fully functional NAS system.

This how-to tutorial shows you how to activate, set up, and use the built-in backup file history feature of Microsoft Windows 10.

Activate built-in Windows 10 back-up feature

The back-up file history feature is located in the Windows 10 Settings menu under Update & Security. Right-click or tap the Start button located in the bottom left corner of a typical Windows 10 desktop and then click the Settings icon to reach the main Windows Settings screen shown below:
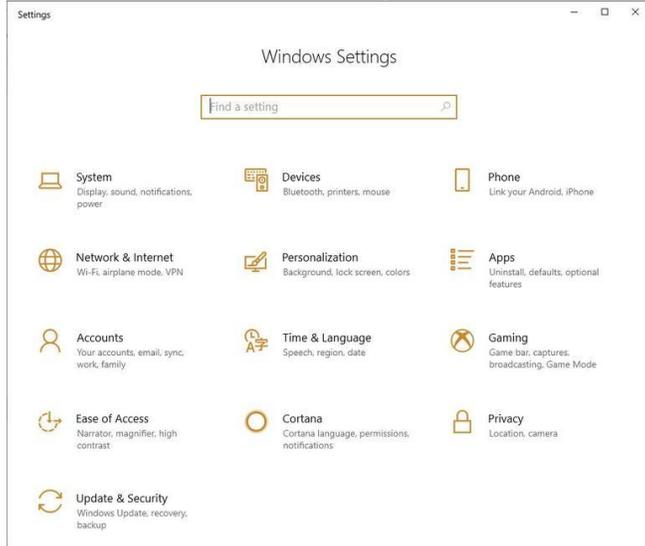

Click the Update & Security item and then click the Backup entry in the left navigation screen, as shown below:
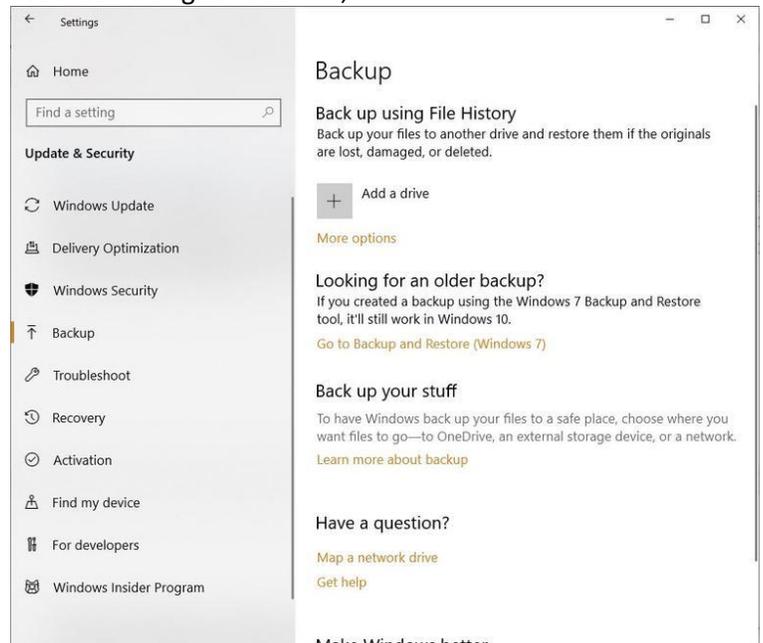

Click the *Add a drive* button located under the first section to reach the configuration screen shown below. You will be presented with a list of available drives currently connected to your computer.

To change devices, or access network storage, you will need to explore some deeper settings. Click the *More options* link under the *Back up using File History* section of Figure B, and then click the *See advanced settings* link to reach the screen shown below. This Control Panel screen is where you can fine tune your back-up settings.
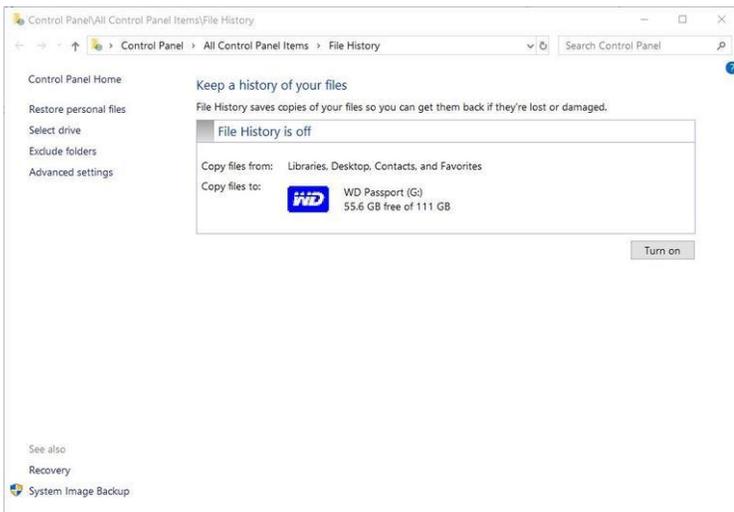
The primary screen shows the current back-up settings and provides a button to turn on or off the feature. If you are looking to restore files, this is also the screen you want to use.

This screen (**Figure D**) also allows you to choose a storage device using the *Select drive* link. Only this screen (**Figure E**) grants you access to devices located on the local network.
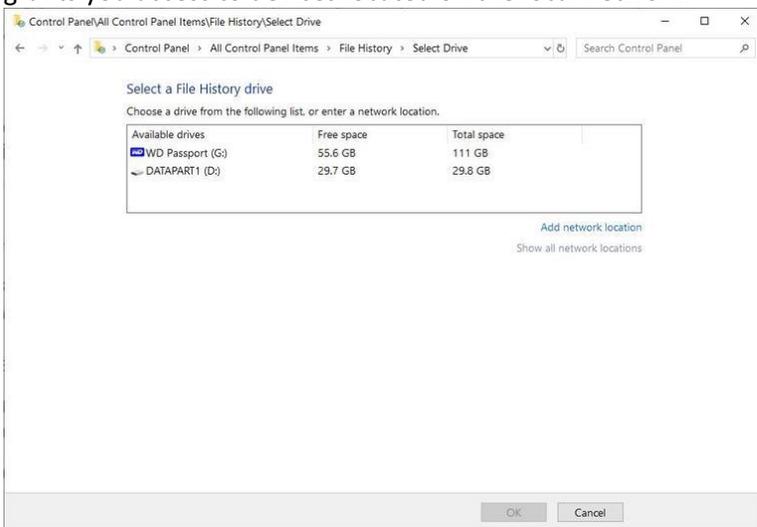
The *Exclude folders* link on the Control Panel configuration screen (**Figure D**) allows you to designate specific folders as off limits for back up. And the *Advanced settings* link takes you to a screen (**Figure F**) where you can fine tune exactly how often and how long your want to back up files in your specified directories.
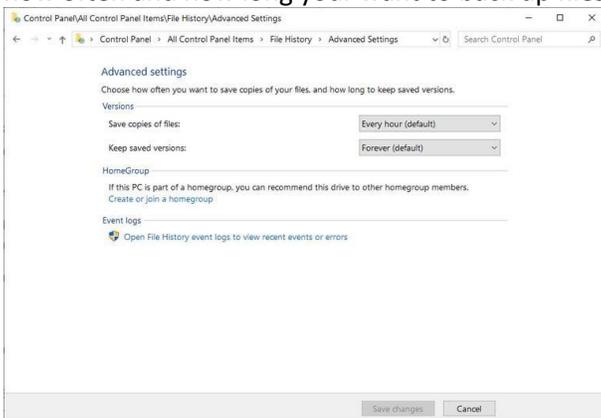
The Microsoft Windows 10 built-in back-up feature is not the most feature-rich back-up and archiving system available by any stretch of the imagination, but it does work simply and effectively, and it is included as part of the operating system. It can be used as a satisfactory basic alternative until a more sophisticated solution can be implemented. Inexorably, the criminals publishing malware are not going to wait for you to get your act together.