

Re: [OT] how to clean grime off old computer MB?

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On Sat, Mar 08, 2008 at 11:05:34PM -0600, Russell L. Harris wrote:

I have a couple of new-to-me old computers. They've been well used in what looks like a normal office environment and they're a bit grimey inside; not just dust that blows away. I figure that I should clean that off so the dust doesn't act like a thermal insulator but I'm unsure what to use, since air alone isn't doing it. I don't want to remove e.g. the CPU from its socket. (P-133, socket 7).

You need to remove all socketed devices, and especially the CPU.

Cleaning presents a danger to the aluminum electrolytic capacitors. Some chemicals quickly penetrate the seals and ruin the capacitors.

Yeah, that's my concern. Boards are usually cleaned of flux after the soldering with circuit-board cleaner, which presumably is safe for the newly-soldered caps.

I'll look, but I think that the only socketed devices are the two CPUs. I do have heat-grease.

A mild concentration of dish detergent (not alkaline dishwasher detergent) in water and a toothbrush, followed by a hair dryer (but be careful not to get the electrolytic capacitors too warm! — they can burst!) likely is the safest approach.

I think that the use of alcohol might be a mistake. At best, alcohol would help get rid of water held by capillary action in the sockets, but warming the board with a hair dryer accomplishes that.

If you have an instrument service shop in your town, phone or visit

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and ask the technician what he uses. Some do use a dishwasher, but I do not know what detergent is safe for the electrolytics (as well as safe for the pump seals of the dishwasher).

I haven't seen any service shops around here. The attitude seems to be swap and replace defective parts rather than cleaning and repairing. A computer more than 6 months old is considered "old".

Years ago, you could purchase a gallon can of Freon-TF, which I believe was safe for aluminum electrolytics; with Freon-TF, you simply put the motherboard in a shallow pan and rinse or soak the board.

Since my main concern is keeping the chips cool (including the CPU coolers), I may worry about surface-cleaning those with e.g. damp Q-tip and not try to soak the board and risk the caps.

Thanks,
Doug.

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