

FP2 - TIP 'O THE WEEK #143 CARE AND FEEDING OF A DATAFILE

When working with FP2, your datafile is your most important file. It lives in the FirePro installation folder, either on the server or on a local computer, and it has the same name as your Fire Department. It's an Omnis Datafile, and usually has an icon that looks like an orange filing cabinet:

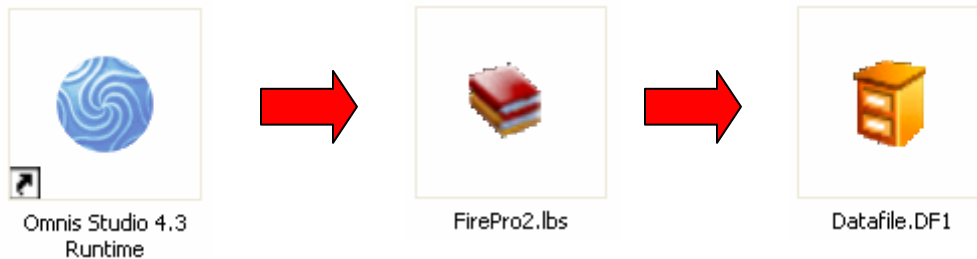


Datafile.DF1

The file extension for Omnis datafile is .df1 - so if you were the Nelson Fire Department, your datafile would be called Nelson.df1.

Here is how FirePro accesses the datafile:

The local computer (the one you are using) has a program on it called Omnis Runtime 4.3. Omnis Runtime is used to open the FirePro2 Library file (FirePro2.lbs). The Library file is attached to a datafile.



Normally, this all happens automatically when you click on the FirePro shortcut on your desktop, but there are some times when it doesn't happen that way.

The thing that changes this most frequently is installing a FirePro update. When you install an update, you are replacing your old FirePro2.lbs library file with a new one - the old library file knows which datafile is yours, but the new library file doesn't - you have to tell it again.

That's why you get a "Please locate your datafile" message the first time you run FP2 after installing an update. You need to locate your datafile for the new library file. It's really important that you always select the proper datafile at this stage, as we'll see in a moment.

Other things that can cause problems here are having multiple libraries - sometimes over a slow network, some users have a copy of the library on their local computer, rather than the network. Since the library is where the

information about the location of the datafile is saved, you'll have to set the datafile for each library.

Network path can also effect connecting to a datafile. If you are using a shared drive, the network path to a file might be different from different computers - the datafile location is set by the last person to log out of FirePro, so in a situation like this, you might find that you were frequently resetting the datafile location, depending on who logged out most recently. Using a mapped network or shared drive (call the folder the E:/ Drive, for example) would solve this problem.

If you are worried that you are not connected to the proper datafile, you can go the File→About FirePro menu in FP2, and check the section called "Datafile". That will show you the current name and location of the datafile that you are attached to.

Some signs that you are connected to the wrong datafile are:

- Missing data - if you entered it before and it's not there now, it's probably on another datafile.
- Incorrect or outdated information - if things like passwords or property records seem old or incorrect, it's probably because they are.
- Omnis errors while installing the update - very old datafiles will often have errors that appear while running the update.

There are several really important things to be aware of regarding your datafile:

1) It contains ALL the data you have entered in FirePro. Everything.

This means that it's really important to back-up your datafile. I know I send out constant reminders, but it's very important to not only do back-ups, but check to make sure automated back-ups are working properly. A number of clients have lost data because their automated back-up wasn't working when they thought it was.

Now might be a good time to also mention a new feature that is available. You can now backup your data file through FirePro. To do that you first need to set up a folder to put backed up data files. Go to Set-up→Custom Settings→Other tab→Settings B Tab. Click on the Browse button in the Backup Folder box. Select the folder you want the backed up data files to go into.

To back up your data file, first make sure all other users are out of FirePro. Go to the Set-up→Backup Data File option. When the process is complete you will get a message so you know all other users can go back into FirePro. You can find the backed up data file in the folder you set up. It will have the same name as your data file with the date in the file name. **This feature does not work when you are connected to your data file through the Omnis Data Bridge.**

The "Best Back-up" award goes to Steve Scanland, of Clearwater Regional Fire Service, in Alberta. Steve not only does nightly automatic back-ups, he also

backs up his datafile onto a flash drive that's attached to his keychain. He literally takes his datafile everywhere - even Mexico!

2) If you enter information into one datafile, it CANNOT be transferred over into another datafile - that's where it stays.

This means that if you accidentally attach your Library to the wrong datafile, you will have to manually re-enter any information that you put on the wrong datafile when you switch back to the right datafile. This can be a time-consuming process, especially if you didn't notice for a week or so.

The best way to avoid this problem is to make sure that you NEVER have multiple copies of your datafile around. Make zipped copies for back-up, sure - but don't have copies of the datafile on the same computer, or even the same network drive - it's like gasoline and matches - probably nothing will happen, but if it does, it's usually bad.

3) It needs routine maintenance - datafiles are very complicated, so they need the occasional tune-up.

We recommend going to the File→Data Utilities menu and running the Quick Check/Repair utility about once a month. Only the administrator can run this, and it can only be done when there is only one person logged into FirePro. A really good time to do this is after you have just installed a new update and you've just backed up your datafile (because you always back up your datafile before installing an update, RIGHT?)

If the Quick Check/Repair turns up any errors, go back into the menu and run the Full Check/Repair. That takes a bit longer, but is much more complete.

As long as you follow the basic guidelines: always back-up, don't keep unzipped copies and do regular maintenance, you will have secure, worry-free computing.

Now wouldn't it be nice if you could make a back-up copy of your car, to replace if your kid dings it up?