

Preparing Your PC for Re-Use or Recycling: Protect Your Private Information

Many PC users incorrectly believe that computer files are gone and irretrievable once they delete e-mails browser links or other files and empty their pc recycle bins. This is actually not true. With the use of simple recovery software, some available as free on-line software (called shareware), information is often easily obtainable. To protect your private information, it is important to always take precautions when passing on, donating, or recycling a computer that you no longer want or use.

Remember: deleting files and emptying the recycle bin does NOT remove the stored data from your hard drive. Deletion is NOT equal to destruction.

Deleting files and emptying the recycle bin will remove shortcuts to your files and render them inaccessible to your computer's operating system. They will also mark these areas of the hard drive as available for re-use. However, until the information is replaced, traces of data related to those files remain and are retrievable through a recovery program. You have options for preparing your computer hard drive for disposal or repurposing, and rendering sensitive personal information inaccessible:

- 1. Reformat the hard drive and reinstall the operating system.** Reformatting using a startup disk, or boot disk, wipes out everything on your hard drive and prepares your PC to accept a new operating system. In older PC models, boot disks were often included with your original purchase; newer models may allow you to create one on your PC; or download one from the manufacturer's website. However, specialized shareware can reclaim files after re-formatting, so if you do not know who will be getting the computer, or if computers aren't really "your thing", you may want to try another option.
- 2. Download free shareware or buy software to overwrite the disk.** Specialized software is available to "scrub", or wipe clean, a hard drive before it is recycled or repurposed. This software overwrites your files with nonsense data. There are many programs available for download on the internet. Several versions come in the form of free shareware, while others are available for purchase. Just type "*hard drive scrubbing software*" into your search engine, and choose a program that best suits your needs. Be sure to pay attention to time requirements when using this method since rewriting the hard drive can often be time-consuming. It may be best to run the software overnight.
- 3. Physically remove and destroy the hard drive.** Physical destruction is the only absolute way of rendering your data inaccessible. The size of hard drives will vary, but generally consist of metal boxes with circuit connectors. For an idea of what a hard drive looks like, type *hard drive picture* into an internet search engine. Ensure the computer is unplugged, open up the case, reach in, disconnect the circuit connectors (plugs) from the hard drive, and remove the screws that hold it in place. Static electricity can ruin the circuitry of a computer, so if you hope to save the rest of the PC, touch the machine's metal frame before reaching in. You can now smash the hard drive box with a hammer to destroy the platters inside, but be sure to wear protective eye wear. The hard drive can contain up to a pound of aluminum, which may now be safely recycled.





1. Unplug from wall and remove screws from casing.



2. Remove casing and locate hard drive (touch metal frame before reaching in).



3. Locate and disconnect the circuit connectors.



4. Pull gently to remove plugs.



5. Remove screws holding HD in place.



6. Slide out the hard drive and casing.



7. Remove any screws and separate the hard drive from its casing.



8. Wear glasses, use hammer to destroy circuitry and warp the platters inside.



9. A few dents in the HD circuit board will render the unit inoperable.



1. Laptop HD: Remove any power cables and battery.



2. Remove HD and destroy as shown above.