

Recycling of Computers

Overview

Computer technology moves at a rapid pace, making computers obsolete within four to five years. Computers that find their way into a land fill will leak toxic and non-toxic materials into the ground and water supply. The following is a breakdown of materials in a common computer.

MATERIAL	LBS/TON	MATERIAL	LBS/TON
Plastic	600	Silver	1
Copper	286	Gold	1
Iron	90	Cobalt	.17
Lead	54	Platinum	.07
Nickel	40	Mercury	.02
Zinc	9		

To prevent these materials from leaking into the landfill, computers, monitors, keyboards, mice, speakers, and other computer components can be recycled. By recycling your old computer, the raw materials can be extracted for new products such as the refurbished computers provided by Computer Banc.

If your old computer has an Intel Pentium processor or equivalent, or runs Mac OS 7 or later, it might still be a valuable addition to an underprivileged child, a local charity, a not-for-profit, or even a school. When you donate your computer for others to use, you can provide a functional computer to those who could not otherwise afford a computer. The additional components (speakers, mouse, keyboard, etc.) can also be donated to make a fully functional system.

Migrating Personal Data from the Old Computer

If you wish to keep and migrate data files from your old computer to store on your new computer, specialized software such as Symantec Ghost is necessary to copy the entire hard drive to the new drive. Generally the new computer will use a different operating system, which would require updated drivers for your hardware, such as video cards, sound cards, etc. There may be several complications doing this, so you may wish to have an experienced computer technician help you. Be sure to back up your old data files first. If you want to transfer any programs, it is recommended that you use the installer packages to properly install the files on the new computer. An experienced computer technician will also be able to assist in the transfer of data files.

Clearing Out Personal Data

Why do this?

The old computer that you want to recycle still has all of the personally identifiable data that you entered into it. If you purchased anything online, did your taxes with your computer, kept track of your finances, or wrote anything in a word processing program, you might not want that data available to the entire world. It is important that you secure your personal information because if your credit card, checking account, or social security number falls into the wrong hands they could destroy you financially.

While it is true that removing the hard drive from the computer and smashing it to bits will prevent others from getting your personal information, it does not have to come to this. There are a number of software tools that can be used to safely erase the data from your computer's hard drive without destroying the hard drive itself.

Where do I get the tools?

Many tools can be downloaded from the Internet to remove all data from your computer's hard drive. Some programs are free and some require a fee for purchase. The free tools work just as well as the paid software, but may take longer or may be less user friendly.

Freeware Tools		
Macintosh	ShredIt	www.mireth.com/pub/sxme.html
Macintosh	SuperScrubber	www.superscrubber.com
Windows	Active@ Kill Disk Hard Drive Eraser	www.killdisk.com/eraser.htm
Windows	Darik's Boot and Nuke (DBAN)	dban.sourceforge.net
Windows	BCWipe	www.download.com/BCWipe/3000-2092_4-10009333.html

Shareware Tools		
Windows	Blancco Data Cleaner	www.blancco.com
Windows	Clean Disk Security	www.diskcleaners.com/clndisk.html
Windows	WipeDrive	www.accessdata.com/products/wipe

Let professionals remove data

If you feel more comfortable having someone else remove the data from your computer's hard drive, you should check with the organization where you are donating your computer, to see if they can provide this service. Make sure you understand how their process works at removing all data, including personally identifiable information. You may even want to ask for a written statement or certificate assuring that the data is removed.

Computer Banc uses a machine designed specifically for removing data or "wiping" the hard drive. This equipment enables many hard drives to be wiped at one time. Using this equipment hard drives are wiped to the Department of Defense specification 5220-22M requiring six passes over the drive.

Summary

Whether you donate your computer to an organization for reuse or take it to be recycled, it is important to remember to delete any personal information from the hard drive first. You can easily remove the data from the hard drive yourself by downloading data erasing tools, or you can have it removed by a professional. Donating your old computer to be recycled or refurbished will help to keep many toxic materials out of the landfill and provide the less fortunate with the opportunity to benefit from owning a computer.