

Do the "PC" Thing: Donate Computers

Upgrading electronic equipment? Do the PC thing: donate your current equipment for reuse. Reusing computers benefits communities, helps us use valuable materials wisely, and keeps working PCs out of landfills.

Getting Started

First, Consider Upgrading Your Software and Keeping Your Computer

Before donating, have you considered keeping your computer longer? Sometimes, software problems can cause a computer to become slow and "crashy," making you want to get rid of the computer and upgrade to a new one. While the hardware of a computer is generally expected to last at least seven years, the lifespan of a software program is generally only three years. Because software is constantly being updated and improved, one way to extend the life of your computer is to simply upgrade your software. Developing some software troubleshooting skills or having a good repairperson available can be helpful. If you do not have the appropriate skills, many good software optimizing utilities are available that can clean up your computer. A comprehensive list and reviews of several optimizing utilities are available at www.download.com/Optimizers-Diagnostics/3150-2086_4-0.html?tag=dir.

Copy Any Data You Want to Retain

Be sure to copy any data you would like to retain (e.g., files, Web URLs, email addresses) to a thumb drive or CDs. For more information on backing up your hard drive, visit www.techsoup.org/howto/articlepage.cfm?ArticleId=230 or www.onenw.org/bin/page.cfm?pageid=8.

Pass It On!



Can Someone Use Your Donation?

If your computer is less than 5 years old and in working condition, chances are someone else can use it. If, however, it is older than 5 years, broken, or below Pentium PC (or Mac Power) level, you should recycle it instead. Visit www.eiae.org or www.electronicrecycling.com for a list of recyclers.



Selecting the Recipient of Your Donation

Schools and charities generally prefer to receive computer equipment that has been checked out by a national clearing-house, such as National Cristina Foundation, or that has been upgraded by a refurbisher. After repairing or upgrading the equipment, refurbishers will then pass on ready-to-use equipment to nonprofits, schools, and low-income individuals at a low cost or for free. See <www.techsoup.org/recycle/donate> for a list of refurbishers. Prior to donating, contact your selected refurbisher to ensure your equipment meets the organization's specifications and packaging requirements.

Clearing Personal Data

All computers have important, non-encrypted, sensitive data on them such as passwords, documents, credit card information, emails, and Web site visit logs. Data on your computer resides in several different hidden places on your hard drive. Deleting a file doesn't really remove it. Emptying your computer's "recycle bin," deleting your Internet browser's cache, deleting your emails and documents, reformatting your hard drive, or even repartitioning your hard drive are all inadequate to erase the data on your computer. Furthermore, many software licensing agreements require that particular programs be removed from a computer before it leaves the original purchaser's ownership. Businesses and other institutions are often required by law to carry out data security actions before computers, their hard disk drives, floppy disks, and other forms of removable media are sent outside of the organization.

Clearing Data Yourself

If you decide to clean your computer yourself, you can purchase software via the following commercial sites, or obtain them for free at shareware sites:

Commercial Windows Disk Cleaning Software

- Blancco Data Cleaner
www.blancco.com
- WipeDrive
www.accessdata.com/products/wipe
- CyberCide Data Destruction
www.cyberscrub.com/products/cybercide/index.php

Is Data Really Gone?

Deleting something from your computer or e-mail is similar to removing a card from the library's card catalog but not removing the book from the shelf—the information is still in the library if you look for it. In the case of a computer hard drive, the file's location information is removed from the drive's index, but not from its place on the drive, so the file can easily be recovered by someone using sophisticated data recovery software.

- DataEraser
www.ontrack.com/dataeraser
- DiskEraser
www.comtechnologies.com
- Clean Disk Security
www.diskcleaners.com/cldisk.html
- DriveScrubber
www.batchconverter.com/DriveScrubber-download-13267.shtml
- East-Tec Sanitizer
www.east-tec.com/disposesecure
- Stellar Disk Wipe
www.stellarinfo.com/file-eraser.htm
- Paragon Disk Wiper
www.disk-wiper.net
- Pinion Sanitizer
www.infraworks.com/sanitizer.php
- UniShred Pro
www.lat.com/Our_Products.html
- Wipedrive
www.whitecanyon.com
- Wipe Info feature in Norton Utilities and System Works
www.symantec.com

Freeware Windows Disk Cleaning Software (the following are available at www.shareware.com)

- Active@ Kill Disk Hard Drive Eraser
www.killdisk.com/eraser.htm
- Darik's Boot and Nuke (DBAN)
dban.sourceforge.net
- BCWipe
www.download.com/BCWipe/3000-2092_4-10009333.html

Macintosh Disk Cleaning Software

- ShredIt
www.mireth.com/pub/sxme.html
- SuperScrubber
www.superscrubber.com
- Wipe Info feature in Norton Utilities (using this, you can delete single documents and files)
www.symantec.com

Leaving Data Cleansing to the Pros

If you would rather leave the data cleansing to a professional, ask your refurbisher if they have a process to cleanse data from computers. Many of these companies use reputable disk cleaning software following U.S. Department of Defense guidelines. This software systematically overwrites all data and then verifies that this was done. Make sure that you have a good understanding of how the company will be addressing your concerns about data security if you will not be addressing this issue yourself. You may even want to go so far as to ask your refurbisher for a written statement indicating the specific method the company will use to cleanse the data from your computer.

Packaging Your Donation

Keep the Operating System Intact

If you are donating hardware with a pre-installed Microsoft operating system, pass on the operating system software. Microsoft licensing agreements require that the software stay with the original machine in which it was installed.

Include Accessories and Original Documentation

Remember to include the keyboard, mouse, speakers, and other ancillary equipment. If possible, also include the original documentation that came with the equipment and proof of license.

Follow Equipment Delivery Instructions

Follow any additional requirements specified by your refurbisher or charity before donation.



Do the PC Thing:



Donate

Additional Resources

For additional tips on donating your computer, visit:

Ten Tips for Donating a Computer

www.techsoup.org/products/recycle/articlepage.cfm?ArticleId=524

Computer Reuse and Recycling Frequently Asked Questions

www.techsoup.org/howto/articlepage.cfm?ArticleId=537

Keeping Old Computers Alive

www.techsoup.org/howto/articlepage.cfm?ArticleId=554

Preventing Trouble on Windows Through Regular Maintenance

www.techsoup.org/howto/articlepage.cfm?articleid=531&topicid=1

Automating Windows Maintenance

www.support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?scid=%2Fdirectory%2Fworldwide%2Fen-gb%2Fmaintain.asp

www.pcworld.com/howto/article/0,aid,107861,00.asp

In addition to the following resources, Internet searches on “donating computers” will also turn up nonprofit organizations that may accept computer donations:

Reusing and Donating Electronics

www.epa.gov/epaoswer/hazwaste/recycle/ecycling/basic.htm

Plug-In To eCycling

www.epa.gov/plugin

National Cristina Foundation

www.cristina.org

Tips for Donating a Computer

www.goodwill.org/page/guest/about/howweoperate/donations/tipsfordonatingacomputer

Microsoft Authorized Refurbisher (MAR) Program

www.techsoup.org/mar/default.aspx

Electronic Industries Alliance

www.eiae.org

eBay's Rethink Initiative

rethink.ebay.com

This fact sheet was developed jointly by Computer Recycling Center/Computers in Education, Computer Recycling For Education, Computers for Schools, Goodwill Industries International, Inc., Hargadon Computer, Intel, National Cristina Foundation, Rethink, San Francisco Dept. of Environment, Students Recycling Used Technology (StRUT) Silicon Valley, Tech Soup (Compumentor), Truecycle, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Plug-In To eCycling program.

