

Fact Sheet

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Network security begins at home: Disposing of old computers

Why do users need to be concerned about disposing of old computers?

Computers often hold personal and financial information, including:

- passwords
- account numbers
- license keys or registration numbers for software programs
- addresses and phone numbers
- medical and prescription information
- tax returns
- files created automatically by browsers and operating systems

Just deleting files or reformatting the hard drive will not remove this information. When you delete a file, the links to reconstruct the file disappear. But the bits and pieces of the deleted file stay on your computer until they're overwritten, and they can be retrieved with a data recovery program. To remove data from a hard drive permanently, the hard drive needs to be wiped clean or destroyed.



What can be done?

Utility programs to wipe a hard drive are available online and in stores where computers are sold. These programs are generally inexpensive. Some are available on the internet for free.

These programs vary:

- Some erase the entire disk, while others allow you to select files or folders to erase.
- Some overwrite or wipe the hard drive many times, while others overwrite it only once.

Consider using a program that overwrites or wipes the hard drive many times. Otherwise, the deleted information could be retrieved. Or remove the hard drive and physically destroy it.

More information and tips for home network security and other personal protective measures can be found on the [U.S. Army Europe vigilance web page](#).