Your Opinion

43% of Americans received phishing e-mail where scammers pose as banks, credit cards or others to get account numbers or passwords. Have you?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I'm not sure

Vote

Tip of the Day

How to delete files for good

The Windows Recycle Bin is not the end for your deleted files. In fact, deleted files linger even after you've emptied the Recycle Bin. That information could be recovered and read if your computer is stolen.

When you delete a file, its space on the hard drive is essentially marked "this space available." The file remains on your hard drive. But Windows considers it forgotten and will reuse the space whenever necessary. Only then will the deleted information be destroyed.

But there's no telling when Windows will use that space for something else. It could be seconds, minutes or days. So the deleted information could hang around quite awhile. Fortunately, there are tools to help ensure that deleted files are truly gone. They're commonly called shredders.

These overwrite deleted files with random, meaningless data. In addition, they can be used for everyday deletion of files. When shredders are used to delete files, the files are gone for good.

There are a lot of shredders available on the Web. A few that I've found are ShredIt ($20), Wipe & Delete ($30) and File Shredder 2000 ($15). All meet the military standard 5220.22-M. And each offers free trial periods. You can find them at, respectively:
http://www.mireth.com/shredit.html
http://www.aevita.com/file/delete/
http://www.gregorybraun.com/Shredder.html

If you've got Windows XP Professional or 2000, you're in luck. These versions include a handy tool to wipe out deleted information. The tiny tool is called Cipher. To use it, you'll need to open the command prompt. But there's not much to it. To open the command prompt, click Start>>All Programs>>Accessories>>Command Prompt.

Cipher is really an encryption tool. But one option allows us to use it to overwrite deleted files. Cipher does a lot of manipulation. So, make backups of your important files and folders.

To use Cipher, type "cipher /w:" (without the quotes) at the prompt. Then add the name of either your hard drive or an individual folder. To secure your whole hard drive, type "cipher /w:C:\" (without the quotes). Cipher will take anywhere between one hour and a few hours.

To specify an individual folder, you'll need to know its path. The path tells Windows which folders to open to find what you want. It reveals the folders you would open if you started from My Computer. For example, the path of the My Documents folder is typically this:
C:\Documents and Settings\owner\My Documents

Some families set up separate profiles for each family member. You can just replace "owner" with your profile name.

For other folders, you can find the paths. Just double-click My Computer. Then keep track of the folders you open to get where you want. The path should be in this format:
C:\folder name\folder name\folder name

The command prompt gets confused by names that contain spaces. If any of the folder names contains a space, put the path in quotes:
"C:\folder name\folder name\folder name"

And that's all there is to it. Your deleted files will be unreadable to thieves. And it's not much harder than shredding information on paper.

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