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Ultimate Data Destruction

Make sure no one can read the data on your old hard drives.

By Patrick Norton, David Prager, and
Roman Loyola

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Hard drives grow in storage and shrink in price every day, so upgrading your hard drive is a no-brainer. But what do you do with that old drive? Chances are, you wipe out the data and donate or sell it. Your data isn't completely gone, however. With a little bit of skill, it can be recovered.

Video Highlight

🔴 Ultimate Data Destruction

Recently, two MIT students found during their two-year study that over half of the hard drives collected had recoverable data. Even more eye-opening: A good number of those drive contained personal information, such as credit card numbers, medical records, and personal letters.

Wipe out that drive

Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean someone isn't after your data. In case we haven't said it enough, emptying your Trash/Recycle Bin doesn't make information disappear. The nature of data stored on a hard drive is such that when you erase or delete it, the data remains. Only the index or table of contents for how to find the data is removed. All it takes is a little skill and a little time to track down your data.

Even a wipe that meets the standards of the Department of Defense isn't enough to protect your data from someone who manages to get your hard drive into their hands. It's a great start. But as long as the disk is round and fresh from your machine, someone has a shot at pulling the right zeros and ones off it to rebuild your company's (or government's) files.

That's why the paranoid destroy the media after they've wiped the disk with software. And, yes folks, if you don't have a blast furnace or a tank of acid, a sledgehammer works nicely. Really, really nicely.

What? Did we say acid? Sledgehammer? Yes, that and more. Be sure to tune in to "The Screen Savers" on Thursday for the destructive details. Maybe you'll see a smashed hard drive or two.

Software tools

If you don't want to physically destroy the hard drive, there are several software tools you can used to wipe out your data. They do a lot better job that a simple reformat.

- **Analog X SuperShredder**
  Free download.

- **LSoft Active KillDisk**

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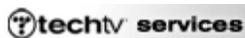Free download. Professional version available for $29

- **Eraser**
  Free download.

- **AbsoluteShield Internet Eraser**
  Free download, or buy for $34.

- **OnTrack DataEraser**
  Buy directly from OnTrack

- **Tolvanen/Heidi Computers Eraser**
  Available as a free download.

- **CyberScrub**
  Download the 15-day trial version, or you can purchase for $39 to $59.

- **Jetico BCWipe**
  Free 30-day trial, or you can purchase for $39.

- **Shred**
  Free download.

- **Multilate File Wiper**
  Shareware, $20.

- **Wipe for Linux**
  Free download.

- **Shredit X for OS X**
  Try it, or buy it for $19.

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