Wiping Old Laptop Hard Drives

I've got a couple of quite old Dell laptops in the back bedroom that need to be put out to pasture. I'm not sure that the hard drives are removable (I'll need to look) so they can be smashed. (Frankly, I wouldn't mind donating the computers to some worthy organization if they can be of use -- suggestions?)

Any recommendations on software or other methods for secure data destruction welcome.

Easy. Just go here:

http://www.dban.org/

Michael A. Koenecke, Texas

Really, the chances of anyone bothering to restore anything you've deleted is probably very low. There are a few free utilities that will overwrite deleted files a few times. I've never heard of anything being recovered after 3 such wipes.

Steven O'Donnell, Pennsylvania

Part of the pain in the neck of this is that to do the data wiping off the hard drive you actually have to get out the computer and set it up and connect the keyboard and mouse and boot the PC and then install the software to delete the data. It's just a pain in the neck when you have so much else to do. No doubt there are poor families or otherwise who could use the computer. But now are you going to do a fresh install of Windows and other software which is needed? So what I've found unfortunately as terrible as it is the easiest way to go is to pull out the hard drive (all are removable) and leave the computer by the curb. Unfortunately.

Rick Bryan, New York

They're laptops so thankfully they just need to be turned on.

Joseph D. Dang, California

If you have a drive dock you should be able to unscrew a panel on the bottom of the laptop, pull the drive out, stick it in the dock, and do a file shred and low level format from another computer that the dock is plugged into. If the drive is still any good you can then use it as a backup drive. Docks are not that expensive and you can get the software to do all this for free. That's what I'd do.

Matthew Parham, New York

I saw this covered on a show on BBC America. Absent destroy the platters themselves there's always a possibility some geek can recover them. Even though that's never the case when it YOUR data you want to recover. That in mind how much is some cracker going to spend to get your data.

John Davidson, Pennsylvania

That is a load of hooey. I defy anyone to produce evidence that usable information has ever been recovered from a hard drive which has been securely wiped (i.e., not only deleted but overwritten a few times).

Michael A. Koenecke

Why don't you just DBAN them? (www.dban.org)

Alan J. Klevan, Massachusetts

Depends on how much money you have to apply to recovery.

John Davidson

No, it does not, no matter how much money you throw at it.

http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/impossible-recover-data-overwritten-hard-drive-technology-explained/

https://www.anti-forensics.com/disk-wiping-one-pass-is-enough/

"Some recommend physically destroying a hard drive or writing to it 3, 7 and even 25 times as the only reliable methods of getting rid of data. This really is not the case. Data is stored

magnetically and are represented by 1s and 0s. In older hard drives it is possible to view previous states that these magnetic areas existed in. Such as a 1 used to be a 0. This is done with an electron microscope in the examples that I'm aware of. Even though this is possible, it would still be nearly impossible to get enough correct readings to put together a document, picture or anything else. There is currently no public example of this method actually returning any useful results.

"Modern hard drives are even more efficient, making it harder to read what state bits were previously in."

Michael A. Koenecke