Old computers may never die - hard drive data should

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Every year millions of computers sign off permanently. Just how many millions is unknown. The National Safety Council says more than 60 million home and business PCs went dark last year. And the Environmental Protection Agency figures that within the next five years 250 million PCs will become obsolete, ripe for replacement.

Whatever the exact number, it's staggering. Even more staggering is that less than one fifth of those machines are reused or recycled. The rest end up in landfills or in storage, often at the cost of hundreds of dollars each per year. Now a number of computer manufacturers, including IBM, are recycling -- even buying and reselling older computers. Using such asset recovery programs, however, requires addressing certain security issues.

Many companies and people give little thought to the data that lingers on old PCs, even after deleting files or reformatting the drive. But several regulations are putting new focus on old data. Most often, such sensitive data pertains to patient information, financial and personnel data, proprietary documents and government data. Much of this is protected by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), the Right to Financial Privacy Act (RFPA) or the Gramm Leach Bliley Act (GLB).

IBM experts say there are only two ways to "sanitize" a drive adequately. One is to de-gaus, or erase, the entire drive, rendering it both unreadable and useless. The other is a process called data overwrite, which as its name implies, replaces existing data with new, nonsensical content.

"IBM Asset Recovery Solutions has dedicated facilities for overwriting large quantities of disk drives," said Jennifer Van Cise, director of Asset Recovery, Global Asset Recovery Services, IBM. "To do that inside a company is typically just too time consuming for IT staff."

IBM overwrites using a standard established by the U.S. Department of Defense. "Your data is deemed to be essentially irretrievable," she says.

About Asset Recovery Solutions
Asset Recovery Solutions offers a complete, end-to-end suite of highly competitive solutions for you to safely and economically dispose of your IBM and non-IBM I/T equipment.Asset Recovery Solutions is available worldwide.

Source: IBM

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