



How to Recycle Your Old Computer

When you buy a new computer, you have an important decision to make. What will you do with your old machine?

The decision is easy when someone else in your family needs it. But if that's not the case, your computer will likely end up on a shelf in the basement collecting dust. If you decide to dispose of it instead, there are a number of options available.

Deliver it back to the manufacturer

You could send your computer back to the source. Several computer companies have fee based recycling programs.

Contribute your computer to charity

You could also consider the organizations and charities that would be pleased to take your old computer.

Industry Canada's Computers for Schools program is a good place to start.

Or check out Electronics Product Stewardship Canada - a not-for-profit organization that is dedicated to finding solutions to Canada's electronic waste problem.

In Toronto, the Toronto Environmental Alliance publishes a guide to companies that recycle and resell. It includes a section on computers.

Thrift stores like the Salvation Army and Goodwill sometimes accept donations of computers, provided they're in decent working condition and meet minimum system requirements.

reBOOT it

reBOOT Canada is a non-profit organization that refurbishes old computers and distributes them to charities and others with limited access to technology reBOOT finds new homes for about 5,000 computer systems every year.

If your equipment is beyond refurbishing, parts of it can still avoid the landfill. At reBOOT, employees keep the useful bits and send the rest to companies that recycle plastic, metal and glass.

With locations in Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Vancouver, Alberta, Saskatchewan and the Maritimes, reBOOT is the largest group of its kind in Canada.



Go Green

If you choose to discard your old computer materials - from old PCs or hardware to ink cartridges and even software - please do it responsibly. Computers should never be tossed into our landfills.

Shockingly, Environment Canada claims we dump more than 140,000 tones of electronic waste into landfills each year. According to the Environment Canada Web site, "That's equivalent to the weight of about 28,000 adult African elephants."

Electronic waste includes toxins such as mercury, lead and cadmium. These chemicals can have a hazardous effect on the environment and human health. Devon MacDonald, executive director of reBOOT Canada, says, "It's not illegal to throw computer equipment into landfill, but it's toxic, so it should be illegal."

Deleted files aren't really deleted

Before you recycle your old computer, don't forget to erase your personal data from your hard drive, so the next user can't see it. But remember to back up your files first – once you've reinstalled your hard drive, you can't get them back.

You might not know that pressing 'delete' does NOT remove a file from your hard drive. It simply tells the operating system to go ahead and save new files in that space on the storage device. Until that happens, your deleted files can easily be recovered. That means many of the files you have 'deleted' over the years are actually still there. And the next user of your machine could easily recover and view your private 'deleted' files by using special utility software.

To ensure your privacy, you'll have to back up and then erase your entire hard drive before you recycle your hardware.

Remember, before you erase your hard drive, it is essential to back up your files. For users of Windows® XP and 2000 operating systems, the easiest way to wipe your hard drive is to reinstall your operating system. The installation CD will prompt you to reinstall with an option to clear your hard drive.

Unfortunately, that trick won't work with Windows Vista™ operating system, which automatically backs up files and then reloads them after the reinstall is complete. Vista users should consider using hard drive eraser software like Killdisk.

If your machine is running on Windows 98 or 95 operating systems, you might want to ask a computer technician at your nearest computer store to guide you through the Process.