

Responsible recycling - disposing of your old computer

Worldwide, it is estimated that we generate 40 million tons of electronic waste every year...

When you're finished with your old laptop, Mac or PC, don't just throw it away in the bin. Make sure you recycle it properly, including safely removing any personal data on your computer's hard disk drive, it's essential to take some steps to securely remove the data on your computer.

What is a hard disk drive?

A hard disk drive (also known as an HDD) is essentially the main form of storage for a computer. This is where all your files are stored, when you save anything on your computer this information is stored on the hard disk drive.

Your computer often holds personal information, which can include:

- Passwords
- Account numbers
- Addresses and phone numbers
- Internet browsing history etc.

When you save a file, pieces of that file are scattered around the hard disk drive and when you reopen the file, it is put back together. However, when you delete the file, parts of it remain on your hard disk which can be retrieved by naughty people with special software.

So, if you're going to recycle the computer the hard drive needs to be wiped clean permanently to delete any traces of these files.

Factory reset it, before recycling

Before recycling a computer, you should reset it to its 'factory settings'. This leaves only the bare operating system and remove any access to your files and any programs you've added.

Make sure you've backed up all the files you want before you begin this process, store them safely on an external hard drive, memory stick or on your new computer.

Destroy your data

Computers going to the scrap pile can end up being recycled anywhere, often with the components stripped out to extract valuable metals. But it's also

possible to extract potentially sensitive data at this point, even with a computer that's been factory reset as mentioned above.

To ensure that all your data has been wiped, consider using data-shredding software. These can be easily found on the internet.

Remove the hard drive

If you're recycling a laptop or desktop and would prefer not to tinker with data-shredding software, the safest way to make sure your data isn't accessed is to physically remove the hard drive and store it in a secure place.

Alternatively, you can smash the old hard drive to make it unrecoverable!

Bash it with a few satisfying blows of a hammer to break the 'platters' that hold the data.

But please remember to wear proper protective gear!

How to Dispose of Your Computer

- **Recycle**
There are many local electronic recycling points on the Algarve, the two I use can be found by the Bombeiros in Lagos and the other in the underground car park of the Aqua shopping centre in Portimao.
- **Donate**
Many organizations collect old computers and donate them to charities.
- **Resell**
Some people and organizations buy old computers. Check local internet and Facebook pages.

Please recycle responsibly.