

DISPOSING OF IT EQUIPMENT POST GDPR

Recycling phones & other tech - is there a security risk?

Like most businesses you have old gadgets and IT kicking around the office, taking up valuable space. You want to have a clear out, but what's the safest way to get rid of it?

Security issue?

Almost 70% of people have concerns that their personal data will be stolen if they recycle their old mobile phones. So they hang on to them. This happens in businesses too, with many stockpiling old laptops etc. because they aren't quite sure what to do with them. Others will just send them to landfill - often once they have been pulverised by staff - because they don't trust recyclers to deal with them securely.

Pressing delete doesn't remove your data - there is an undelete function! There are also recovery tools that can be used to access things that you thought had been erased forever. Which? managed to access 22,000 deleted files from eight second-hand hard drives bought online.

You can't just throw equipment in the bin in the hope it will be buried. There are laws that require you to recycle old IT separately. The **Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Regulations 2013** ensure that equipment is recycled rather than buried (there are lots of valuable materials and some hazardous ones in old gadgets). The rules cover everything from smoke detectors and electric drills to computers and cookers. **Tip.** You need to make sure you give the waste to a registered carrier or take it to a registered site. See **The next step** for a simple guide, but if you are unsure check with your local authority or the Environment Agency as the **WEEE** rules are currently under review.

How much? Whether there's a cost depends on several factors, including the equipment, your location, when it was made, the manufacturer etc. You can also donate old IT that still has a bit of life in it to a charity scheme (see <http://itforcharities.co.uk>). **Tip.** More often than not the firm you are buying replacement equipment from will have to take your old devices for recycling due to their obligations under **WEEE** , regardless of the make. Sometimes you'll get a discount thrown in too.

A quick buck

Another option is to sell it. There are myriad sites online all vying to take old mobile phones and gadgets off your hands. Some of the offers can seem very attractive indeed, but you need to be aware that headline prices are very rarely the ones you'll get. **Trap.** Some sites will offer a big price but in the small print it will say that they can reduce this if they think there's more damage than you've said. What's more, if you then decide to get it back and try elsewhere, you'll be charged £10 or more for postage. **Tip.** Look at comparison sites like On Recycle, which will give you the best prices for your device. Some of these also show customer reviews so you can check whether you are likely to be duped on price or not.

What about your data?

The last thing you want is for your computers etc., and any data on them, to end up in the wrong hands. Whether you are donating, selling or recycling your old IT, you need to delete all sensitive information yourself, or ensure the company handling the equipment will. If you are in any doubt then get a specialist in to remove all sensitive data before you recycle, sell or pass on any equipment.

Summary

Whether you're donating, selling or recycling your old IT equipment, you need to delete all sensitive information yourself, or ensure the company handling it will. If you're in any doubt get a data removal specialist in first.