Hazardous Waste Management

Advice on disposal of computers and media storage devices

The University takes data security very seriously. So should you.
Redundant, or broken, computers or memory storage devices (memory sticks and cards, CR roms, floppy discs or tapes) may contain sensitive information on hard drives. This data should be destroyed before the computer leaves your department.

If you don’t believe that 34% of discarded hard drives still contain confidential data then read this page - http://uk.simsrecycling.com/news-and-resources/news/07-may-09-discarded-data-threat

We are grateful to David Barker, Computer Systems Manager in our Department of Mechanical Engineering for the following sound advice;

Computers:

When disposing of computer related equipment it may be worth bearing in mind the following points;

**Hard disk drives:** Normally, and wherever possible, remove the hard disk drive (HDD) from the computer and scrap the computer without the drive. If the drive(s) are not required to be reused within the University then they should be either erased or physically destroyed to prevent any unauthorised access to the data they may contain. This is especially important where such things as student/staff records are concerned and bearing in mind that this could have repercussions with regard to the Data Protection Act.

Access to any data may be prevented using one of the following methods;

**Use a Disk Erase utility program.** Although this procedure erases data and preserves the HDD for possible reuse, it should not be counted on as being foolproof. Use it only for erasing data that is of limited significance. Remove ALL current partitions and re-partition and format to be a single partition. Then use an erase program to erase this now single partition. Note that this procedure can take some considerable time to perform.

**Physically destroy the disk:** For small drives of not much future use or where extremely sensitive (or unknown) data may have been stored, you can either physically remove the platters from the drive and, using a pair of pliers, bend them completely out of shape or you can drill a large hole down through the whole drive itself (possibly using a stand drill). The point being to render the drive platter surfaces completely unreadable. Though if physically destroying a drive, do ensure that you observe proper Health and Safety considerations, e.g. wear safety glasses, leather gloves etc.

Storage media;

**Floppy Disks:** If these are thought to contain data then they should be cut up before disposal. Also ensure that no usable information is shown on the paper disk label.

**Compact Disks (CD/DVD):** These can often contain user backups, which in turn could mean them containing sensitive information. Use a sharp instrument to badly score the disk surface. This will render it unreadable. Again observe Health and Safety considerations if carrying out such a procedure.

Arranging for disposal;

Simply email the Waste Team (waste@lists.bath.ac.uk), giving details of what needs collecting, and ask for a collection. Do not just leave items outside buildings.

The Simms Metal Management Group (the contractors we use for disposal of computers, disc drives and storage media) do make any data unrecoverable.

Where possible **monitor screens** (especially CRT - cathode ray tube - screens) should be left intact and not broken, thus neither releasing the chemical contents nor generating shards of glass.

**Batteries** should also be segregated as these often contain toxic metals etc. They can also be sent for disposal via the Waste Team (waste@lists.bath.ac.uk).