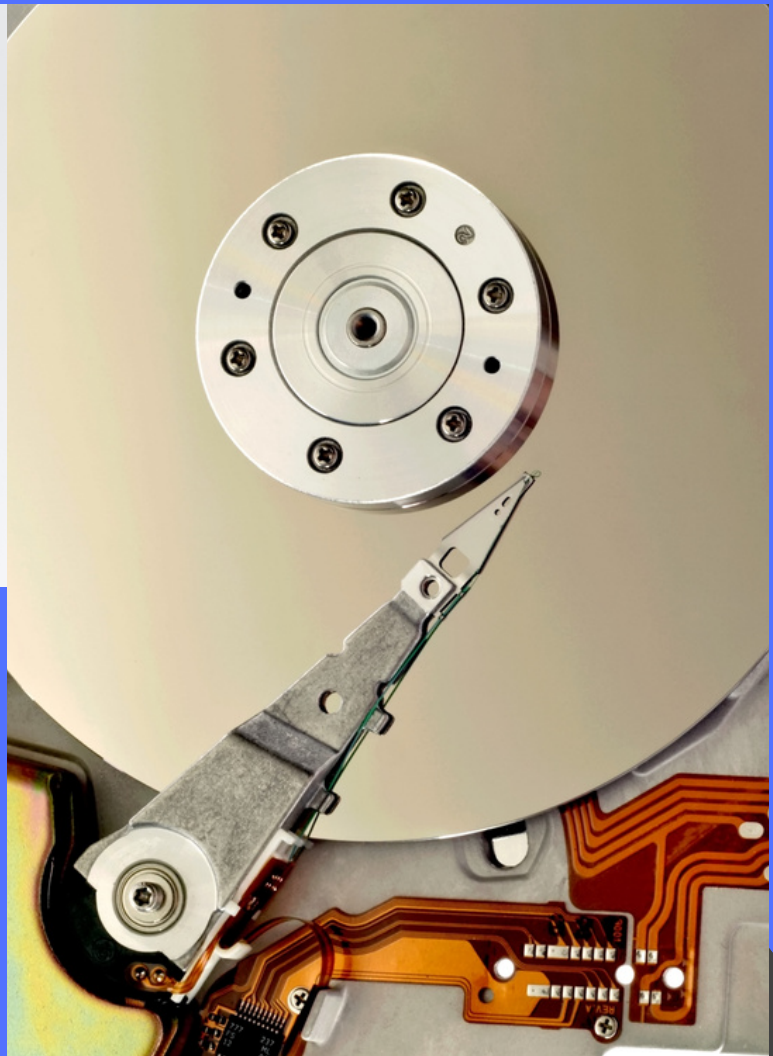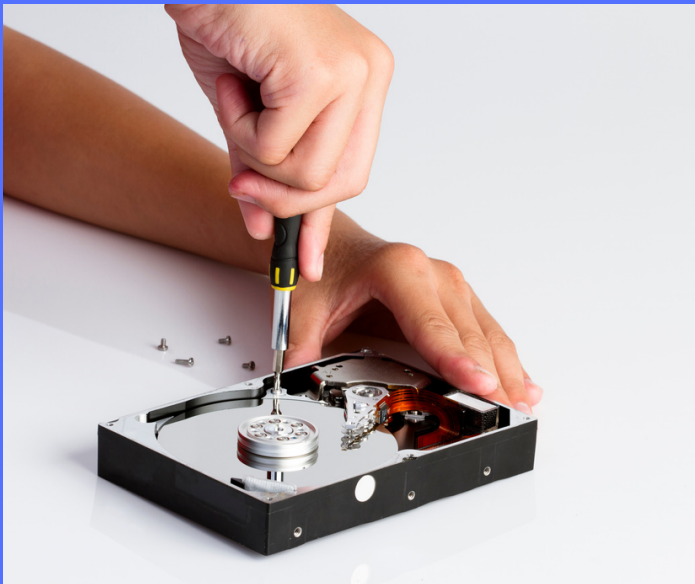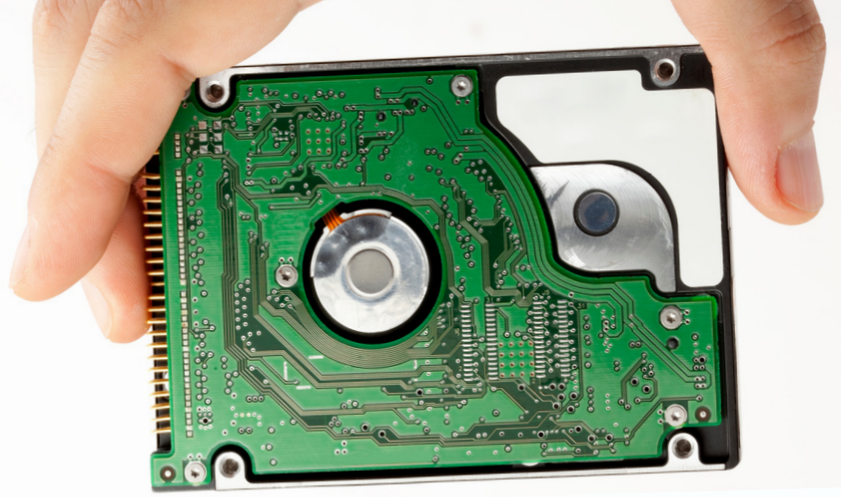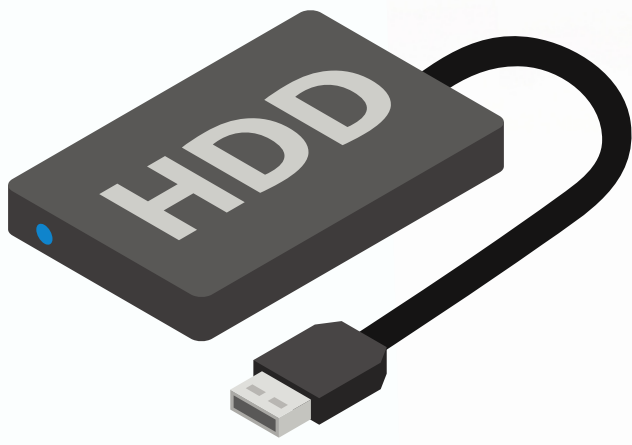# HOW DO YOU DISPOSE OF OLD HARD DRIVES?

How to securely dispose of old hard disk drives and SSDs

Here are some tips for securely disposing of old drives and SSDs and how to do it safely.

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Go to your local computer store and ask if they'll take old drives for recycling. Apple Stores will recycle old industries for free, and I believe other stores charge a small fee, but that money goes to charity. Some companies specialize in taking hard drives out of electronics and recycling them responsibly.

There are three things you should know about this option. First, hard drives contain a lot of sensitive information that you might not want anyone to see. Even if the data is encrypted (as it should be), there are ways to get around encryption. If your drive has an operating system, it can sometimes be cracked open, and the data read directly from the disk.

Second, hard drives don't last forever. They have a limited lifespan, and they do eventually fail. This can happen soon after being removed from the computer or many years later. Third, you can't trust the company that might be making the data recovery. Even if they don't do anything illegal, there is a high probability that they will sell your data to a third party. So be careful to securely dispose of old drives and SSDs data.

How to securely dispose of old hard disk drives and SSDs

So you've decided to get rid of your old hard drive or SSD. Here are some tips for securely disposing of old drives and SSDs and how to do it safely.

You use drives or SSDs in your Macs or pc, and hopefully, you also use some hard drives to back up your data. Over time, some drives and data go bad, and others get too small, so you replace them. You may be able to repurpose old hard drives, but in some cases, they've lived a good life, and it's time to consign them to the bit bucket.

But you can't just throw away a hard drive or drop it off at a hard drive recycling center. These drives may contain personal data, Company data, and you need to deal with them carefully to ensure that no one can recover your information. Here's how.

When to upgrade drives

You should have a backup of your Mac and of all its data for future use. Ideally, you use a combination of Apple's Time Machine and Indigo Personal Backup to ensure that all your drive data is backed up securely and redundantly. (Two backups are better than one.)

Over time, you acquire more data, especially if you have a growing media library that drives age. That 1 TB drive you bought a few years ago for use no longer holds all your music and movies, so you need to get a larger hard drive. In some cases, you can still use that older drive for use other backups, but as time goes by and you upgrade every few years, you'll have a collection of hard drives of varying sizes that aren't really worth keeping.

I'm pretty careful about my hard drive data and my backups, and I tend to replace my hard drives every three years or so. Statistics show that the failure rate for hard drives increases substantially around that time, and it's often around then that I find I need more drive storage anyway. Your usage may vary, but given the low cost of drives today and the need to ensure that you don't lose data this time, that's probably a good time to look for replacements.

How to erase drives

Before going any further, you should securely erase your hard drives. This article tells about the hard drive for you, how to do this with Disk drive Utility, and also how to securely erase free space from a hard drive and SSD from the command line (using the Terminal app) since you can't securely erase SSDs.

It's worth noting that if you've been using File Vault, or encrypted your hard drives with your Mac, then you probably don't have to worry about erasing them. As long as the passcode required is complex enough that no one can figure it out, then you may feel comfortable with just taking the hard drive recycling center. However, if you are still worried about recycling drives, haven't encrypted the drives, or if you're not sure and they don't work, then you should take them apart.

How to disassemble hard drives

When you've got a bunch of old drives you want to get rid of, it's time to get out some drive tools and get to work. You'll need a number of obscure screwdrivers for separate parts of the drive, so it's best to buy a set of computer tools. I use a tool kit, and I've never encountered a screw for which it doesn't have ahead.

Start by unscrewing every screw you can find for the hard drive, especially on the aluminum cover of the disk. Some hard drives have a number of different types of screws, and others use all the same type. You may find that some screws are stuck, and you may need to resort to some other tools to separate parts of the disk drive. (Keep a good pair of pliers and a sturdy flat-head screwdriver handy.) Here's one drive I took apart where I couldn't get all the screws for separate parts of the disk drive off the cover, so I had to bend it with pliers:
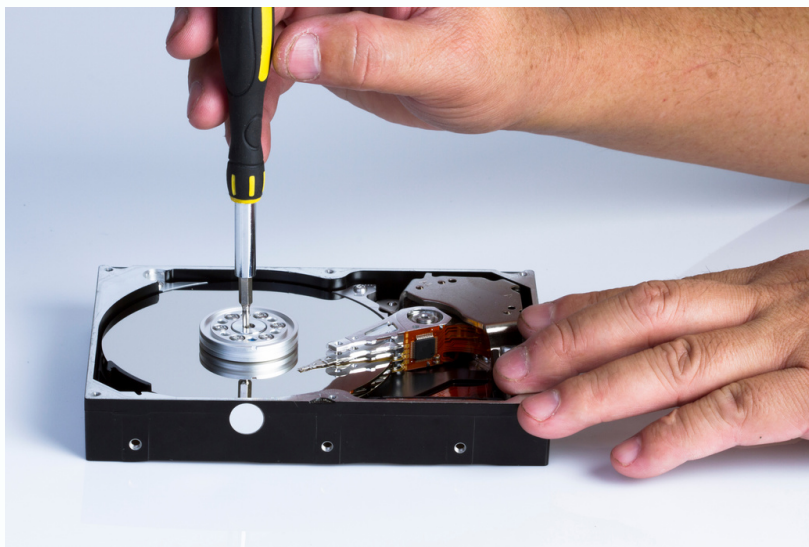
Depending on the size of the hard drives, and their ages, the platters will be a different size. I recently destroyed some 2.5" drives, and the platters were made of glass. For these hard drives, you can just shatter the platters. Be careful. The hard drive glass can be very sharp, so goggles and gloves are recommended.

3.5" hard drive platters are made of aluminum, with several coatings of different materials. For these platters, there are a number of ways to ensure that Disk data cannot be recovered. Depending on your tools for the separate disk drive, you could:

Steep1: Soak them in acid

Steep2: Scratch them all over with a screwdriver

Steep3: Sandblast them

Steep4: Deface them with a multi-tool (a grinding head)

Steep5: Demagnetize them with a very strong magnet

Plan ahead

It's best to plan ahead and use full-disk encryption for all your hard drives, so you don't have to worry about your drive data being accessible when you need to get rid of them. Securely erasing data from the drives is a good idea, and as a last resort, disassembling them and destroying the platters makes a good weekend project.