HOW TO SAFELY DISPOSE OF YOUR OLD MOBILE DEVICE

Your mobile device probably holds sensitive information like addresses and phone numbers, passwords, account numbers, email, voicemail, and text message logs. When getting rid of your old device, it's important to take steps to help ensure this information doesn't fall into the wrong hands.

First, try to use the factory reset. Many devices allow you to "wipe" your device and clear nearly all the information in its memory. Sometimes, this is called a "hard reset," or "factory reset." You may be able to save or transfer the information to your new device before you delete it from your old one. For detailed instructions on how to "wipe" your device, read your owner's manual or check the website of your mobile provider or the device manufacturer.

Second, remove or erase SIM and SD cards. Many mobile devices store information on a SIM card or an external SD card as well as in the device's internal memory. If you're keeping your phone number, ask your mobile provider about transferring your SIM card to your new device. SD cards often contain photos and other sensitive information. Even when you "wipe" your device, your SIM card or SD cards may retain information about you. Remove them from your device or delete the data that's stored on them.

Once you have a "clean" phone, it's up to you to decide what to do next. Recycling it is one option. Many mobile device manufacturers, wireless service providers, and other groups have programs to refurbish mobile devices or recycle their components, including accessories like chargers.

Another option is to donate your device. Many organizations collect used mobile devices for charitable purposes. You also might decide to trade in your device for a credit toward a new one; resell it to a person or an organization; or just dispose of it altogether. If that's your choice, keep the environment in mind. The EPA recommends that you check with your local health and sanitation agencies for their preferred way to dispose of electronics.