

How to Securely Erase Personal Data from a PC before Disposing

You should erase your personal information from an old PC before disposing of it at a recycling center or giving it to someone. This includes files like documents, pictures, music, taxes, email, web history, etc. The problem is that most people don't know all the locations that need to be deleted. Also, even deleted files can be recovered by someone who knows what they are doing.

This document will show you how to securely erase your personal files in a simple way that will make it impossible for the files to be recovered. Contact us for help if this appears complicated or confusing.

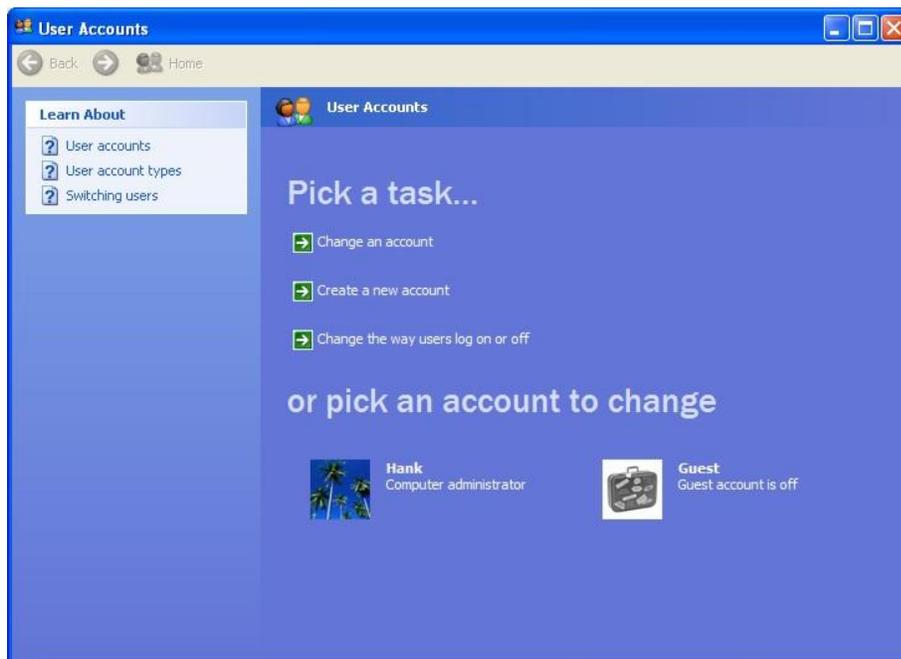
Step 1 - Create a new user account on the machine

You will use this account to delete your old user account(s).

Open Control Panel and choose User Accounts. In the example below, the User Account I want to delete is called Hank. I want to create a new User Account called User.

WARNING

Once your files are securely erased there is no way to recover them. Make sure all the files you want to save are copied off the old PC before using these procedures!



Click on Create a New Account

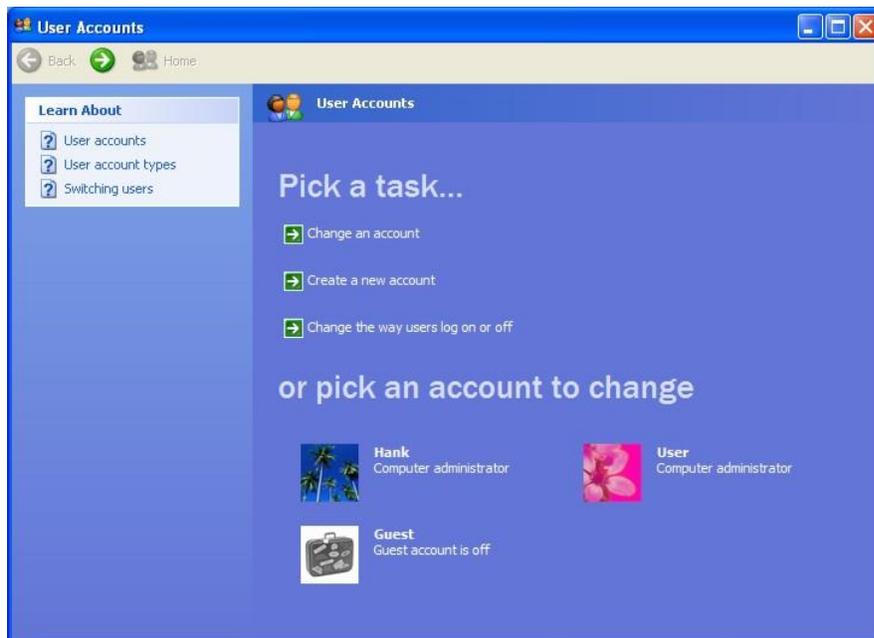
Give it a different name than the ones currently on your machine: User and Owner are good generic account names to use. Make sure the account has full administrator privileges.

Log off or restart the machine and log in to the new User Account you just created.

Step 2 – Delete your old account(s)

Open Control Panel and choose User Accounts

This time click on your old account. In the example below I would click on Hank.



Click on Delete the Account then click the delete files button.

This will get rid of documents, pictures, music, desktop, internet files, contacts, and email – all the files stored in your user account.

Repeat this for each User Account on the machine.

Step 3 – Delete any personal files outside your User Account

If you store files outside your user account, you will need to delete them also. Some typical examples are Quicken or QuickBooks files that are sometimes stored under Program Files. Check the Shared Documents folder or Public folder for personal files. Be sure to empty the recycle bin.

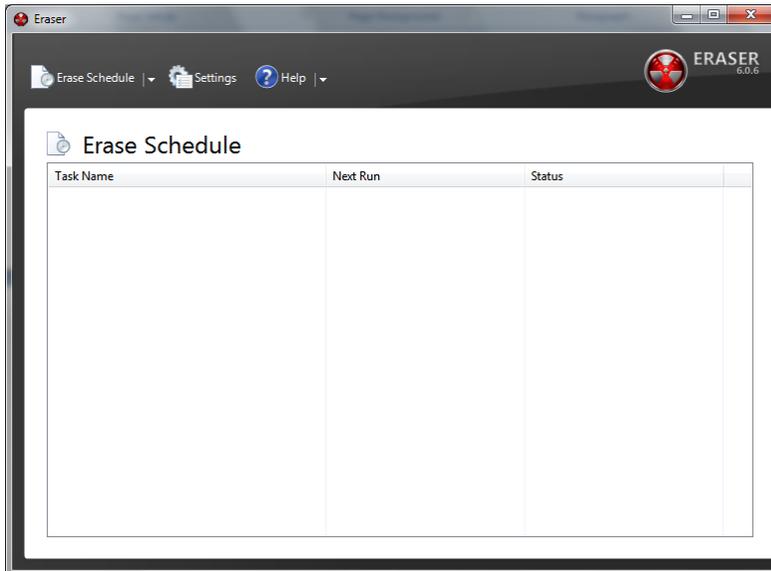
Step 4 – Securely erase all deleted files

Now that you have removed your User Account(s) and personal files, you need to make sure that they cannot be recovered. This is accomplished by running a program that securely erases all the free space

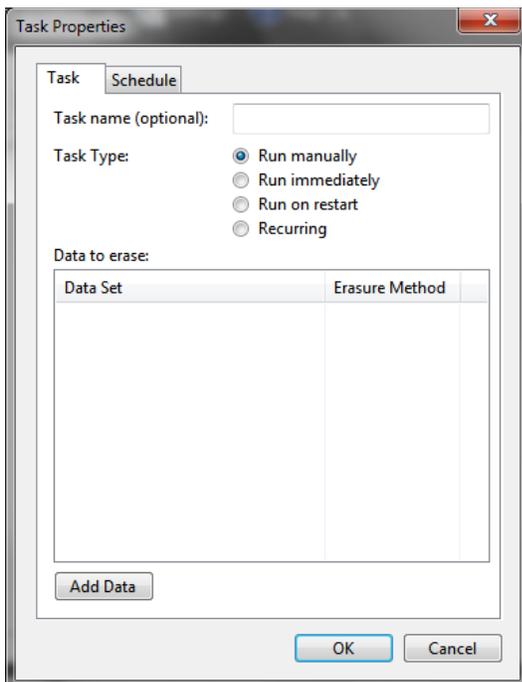
on your hard drive. This leaves the operating system and programs intact but makes it impossible to recover your personal files and information.

Download and install the free program called Eraser. You can get the program at <http://www.download.com>

Start the Eraser program

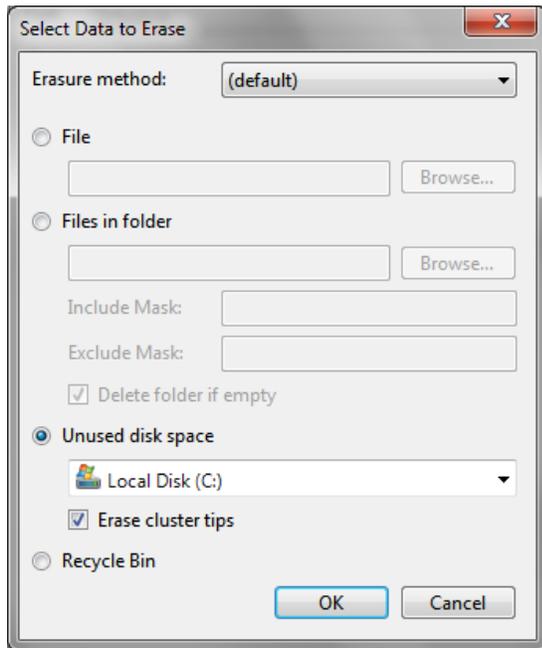


Right click in the blank part of the window and choose New Task

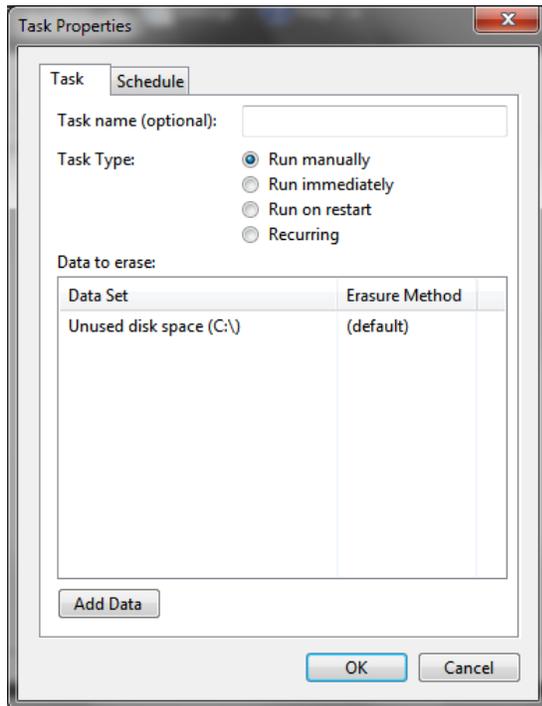


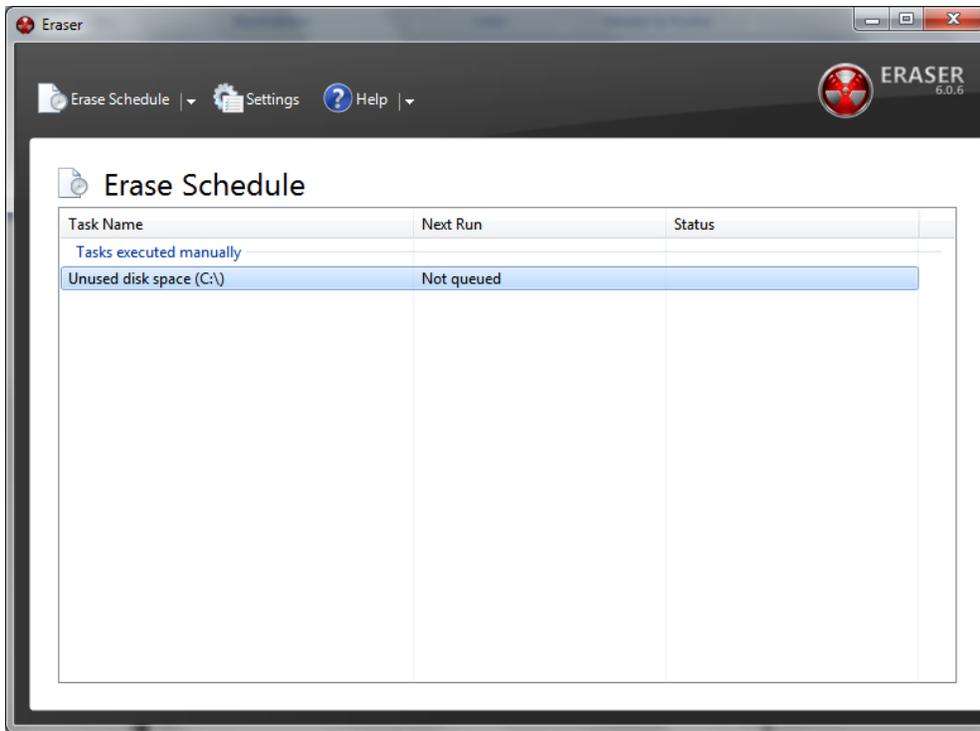
Click the Add Data button

Select Unused disk space and be sure Local Disk (C:) is selected.



Click OK to add the task.





Select the Unused disk space task, right click on the highlighted task and choose Run Now.

Depending on the size of your hard drive, this could run for hours.

You will need to run an Eraser task for each drive that you stored personal files on.

Step 5 – Dispose of the old machine

Now you are ready to give away or recycle your old PC knowing that your personal files and information are securely cleaned off.