

How to Securely Delete Files on a Macintosh Computer

Welcome to how to securely delete files on a Macintosh computer. If you move a file on a Macintosh to the trash and then empty the trash to delete it, you are removing only the reference to the file. The file may still be retrieved by file recovery tools. To ensure that a file is completely deleted from the hard drive, you'll need to select secure empty trash. Drag the file to the trash and we can see that the file is in the trash. Then if we go to Finder, we have two choices, we can either select Empty Trash or Secure Empty Trash. Again, Empty Trash will only remove the reference to the file, it may still be recoverable by file recovery tools. Secure Empty Trash is the one to select and it will overwrite your files seven times to Department of Defense standards. You'll receive a window that informs you, "Secure Empty Trash permanently erases the items in the Trash. Are you sure you want to permanently erase them? If you choose Secure Empty Trash, you can't recover the items unless you've backed them up using Time Machine or another backup program." So in this case we are going to use Secure Empty Trash. Now this process might take a little longer depending on how many files you have in the trash can depending on how many items you have in the trash can because it is overwriting your files seven times.

If you reassign a computer to another person or sending it to surplus, OET will securely wipe the computer's hard drive of all data. In this case, you will not need to delete files individually as OET will securely erase all files from the hard drive.

On a side note, it is a good idea to routinely search for and to delete files that you no longer need or files that contain PNPI or personal non-public information. If personal, non-public information absolutely must be stored locally in the unit, it must be encrypted per University policy. However, it is always preferable to delete any files with PNPI.

For further information on tools to securely delete files, visit www.oet.udel.edu.

As always, if you have questions, please contact oet-help@udel.edu.