



THE SAVVY CONSUMER COLUMN

The Savvy Consumer
Mary Clement, Director, Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs

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Safely dispose of old cell phones to protect private information

Nashville, TN – If you own a cell phone, at some point you are likely to upgrade to a newer model. The Division of Consumer Affairs urges you to safely dispose of your old phone.

“It is important to properly dispose of your old cell phones to prevent your personal information from being stolen,” said Mary Clement, Director of Consumer Affairs. Cell phones are like laptop computers, they are often repositories of personal and sometimes sensitive information, including addresses, phone numbers, passwords, e-mail and account numbers. You wouldn’t dispose of your old laptop computer without wiping the hard drive clean; mobile devices deserve the same level of attention before you discard them. Encrypting passwords and other sensitive data stored on your cell phone can help prevent unauthorized access even after your cell phone is no longer in service. However, certain data on your phone, including contacts, photos and web search items may be recoverable with simple and inexpensive software programs.

Before you dispose of your old phone:

- Remove all personal information. Always remove the subscriber identity module (SIM) card from the phone.
- Remove all stored contacts in your phone book.
- Delete any lists of calls (received and made).
- Delete all voice mails, and sent and received e-mail and text messages.
- Delete photos and all web search history.

Your owner’s manual or your wireless provider will likely provide information on how to permanently delete information from your mobile device. Once you have deleted all personal information from your old phone, you can recycle or donate the phone. Cell phone manufacturers, service providers and nonprofit groups often have programs to refurbish mobile devices or recycle their components. Many organizations also collect old mobile devices for charitable purposes.

Consumer Affairs is a division of the Department of Commerce and Insurance, which works to protect consumers while ensuring fair competition for industries and professionals who do business in Tennessee.

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