

Privacy For Your PC

Your PC is ready and willing to reveal what you've been up to. Give nosy types a few hours to dig around, and they can unearth plenty: incoming and outgoing mail you've deleted, Internet sites you've visited, search criteria and data you've entered on Web forms, even phrases you've included in a document--then thought better of and deleted. Fortunately, you can protect yourself if you know these insider tricks. Here's how to keep your personal PC information hidden.

take out your recycling

Get rid of files you think you've already nixed from your system. We're talking about all the trash you banish to your Recycle Bin. Sure, you can empty it out whenever you remember (double-click on its icon, then choose "File, Empty Recycle Bin"), but a better way is to turn off the Recycle Bin. To truly delete your files the first time around, right-click on the Recycle Bin and choose "Properties," then "Global." Check the box called "Do not move files to the Recycle Bin. Remove files immediately on delete."

clean up and lock down

Even if snoops can't view your documents directly, they can get an idea of what you've been doing by scanning your list of recently used files in Microsoft Word or Excel's File menu. This temporary menu lists even files you've recently deleted, so it's best to turn off the option. In Word or Excel, select "Tools, Options," then "General." Uncheck the box labeled "Recently Used File List."

Next cover the tracks of your current documents. Pop up the Start menu and select "Documents." It shows a list of the last 15 or so files you had open--making it too easy for someone to browse through your work or personal files without even searching your hard drive. To hide your work, clear the menu by clicking on the Start menu's "Settings" folder, then selecting Taskbar. Choose the "Start Menu Programs" tab, then click on the "Clear" button at the bottom of the tab.

Clean out your temp files. Microsoft Word and other apps usually save temporary copies of your work in progress to guard against system crashes. Many apps also save text you've deleted, moved, or copied--even if you haven't saved the file you're working on. Get rid of those snippets by routinely deleting the temporary files that each app saves in the WINDOWSTEMP folder. Also make sure to delete all the files within its subdirectories, such as those labeled FAX and WORDXX. Many of the files have extensions such as TMP, but they are actually complete versions of DOC, HTML, or even image files.

Lock important files by using a password-protect for critical files. It's easy in Word and Excel. Choose "File, Save As," then select "Options." In the password box, type in a password; the best passwords aren't real words or dates. Use a combination of letters, numbers, and punctuation for a password that's hard to guess. You'll have to type in your password each time you open and save the document.

caught in your own web

Enter websites without being followed. Navigator and Internet Explorer keep a record of every Web address you type into your browser. Take a look: Enter a URL in the location window below the toolbar; the browsers record the URL in their drop-down menus until other entries replace it. Here's a way to visit a site undetected: In either browser, press Ctrl-O to bring up a dialog box, then type the URL into it.

Your browser is the next area to safeguard. Both Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator keep lists of all the places you've been, including the specific pages you've visited, searches you've done, and data you've entered. To view your Web history in Navigator, press Ctrl-H; in Explorer, choose "View, Explorer Bar, History." To delete Navigator's history items, highlight the desired items and press the "Del" key, or delete them all at once by choosing "Select All" on the Edit menu, then press the "Del" key. Internet Explorer stores your Web history in weekly folders or by website. You can delete individual URLs, but the quickest way is to delete entire folders. To clear out your whole history, select "Internet Options" from the Edit menu, choose the "General" tab, and click on the "Clear History" button.

Clean out your cache. Both Explorer and Navigator keep caches of recently visited Web pages on your hard drive. This speeds up Web access when you revisit the pages, but it also leaves you open to snoops. To clear your cache in Navigator, choose "Preferences" from the Edit menu, click on the + sign next to the Advanced selection, then click on "Cache." Now click on the button labeled "Clear Disk Cache." In Explorer, select "Internet Options" from the View menu and click on the "General" tab. Click on the button labeled "Delete Files." You can also set your browser so it doesn't use a cache at all--yes, this slows surfing. In Navigator, select "Edit, Preferences, Advanced." Click on "Cache" and set the Disk Cache box to 0. In Internet Explorer, select "View, General, and Settings." Then move the slider all the way to the left.

Information above is provided by HP