# Recycling Old Mobile Phones Could Lead to ID Theft

July 9, 2015 â€“ Every year, millions of Americans get new cell phones even though their old device is still working as designed. So it is only logical that a large percentage of them decide to recycle their old phones. Why not? In some cases, those old phones can be worth a couple of hundred dollars. There is just one problem. Most of the people turning in their old phones are also turning over some very personal data that is stored on them; creating a situation that could lead to identity theft.

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As the use of smart phones has grown, so has the amount of personal data stored on them. A lot of people now use their smart phone more than they do their personal computer. And the information stored on these devices is often just as valuable as the information once reserved for computers. It includes passwords, banking and credit card information, and wide variety of documents.

Not only are many smart phones more vulnerable to hacking than computers, consumers donâ€™t tend to protect them the same way that they do their computers. Think about it. Nobody would dream to ask you to turn in your old computerâ€¦ data includedâ€¦ the next time you purchase a new one. And if you were asked to do that, at the very least you would probably want to have all of the data wiped off of it.

Nobody seems to have that issue when it comes to cell phones though. There are even phone recycling companies that will ask you to simply pop your phone in the mail and send it to them.
So, what is a budget conscious consumer to do?

The best way to avoid exposure to ID theft when switching phones is simply to refuse to recycle it. Put the phone in a drawer or the back of a closet and forget about it. But if that suggestion doesnâ€™t work for you, there are some precauctions that you can take to mitigate the risk.

First, take out any removable storage cards â€“ also known as Micro SD cards. Some phones have cards that contain 128 gigabytes of data; which is more than some new computers. Thatâ€™s a lot of data. Removing these cards will not impact the operation of your phone and any new owner can install their own cards.

If your phone uses a SIM card, remove it too. If your phone is from AT&T or T Mobile, your phone has one of these cards. These are not the only carriers that use them however so you may want to do some research before recycling.

Phones also have internal storage. You may have to do some research on your model of phone but you need to wipe the data on your internal storage. NOTE: Simply deleting the files is not the same thing as a data wipe. Deleted files can be recovered.

Many people think that they can do a factory reset on their phone to wipe out all data. Donâ€™t rely on this. A research study by Cambridge University showed that 80% of the data stored on phones could be recovered after a factory reset. The CTIA Wireless Industry Association has prepared a check list of steps consumers should take with their old phones. The list also contains links to third party tools that will wipe or overwrite data stored on their phones. The list contains programs that will run on all of the more popular cell phone operating systems.
byJim Malmberg
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