



IRON MOUNTAIN®

ENTERPRISES HAVE ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT IN SECURE IT ASSET DISPOSITION

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Although organizations cite a host of reasons for adopting strategies and programs for secure IT asset disposition, research finds important gaps in organizational practices and compliance.

Disposing of decommissioned, outdated and broken IT assets — from data center infrastructure to client systems and even office equipment — has taken on heightened urgency in recent years. Slow but steady improvement in economic conditions, combined with the introduction of attractive new technologies throughout the enterprise, has led to big increases in the amount of equipment that must be securely, efficiently and legally disposed of each year.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that more than 500 million tons of electronic waste, including 30 million computers, is created each year.¹ Where do all of those old computers, smartphones and data-bearing office equipment go? That depends on a random, often haphazard set of disposal methods, ranging from reuse and recycling of equipment under well-defined governance programs to stacking up old systems in an office basement or a corner of a wiring closet.

Adding to the urgency to properly and securely dispose of IT assets are regulatory requirements surrounding the need to safeguard proprietary data that resides on those machines. Finally, more and more organizations have begun instituting eco-friendly programs and policies that encourage or even mandate the proper recycling and discarding of electronic waste versus throwing it into the garbage or directly into landfills.

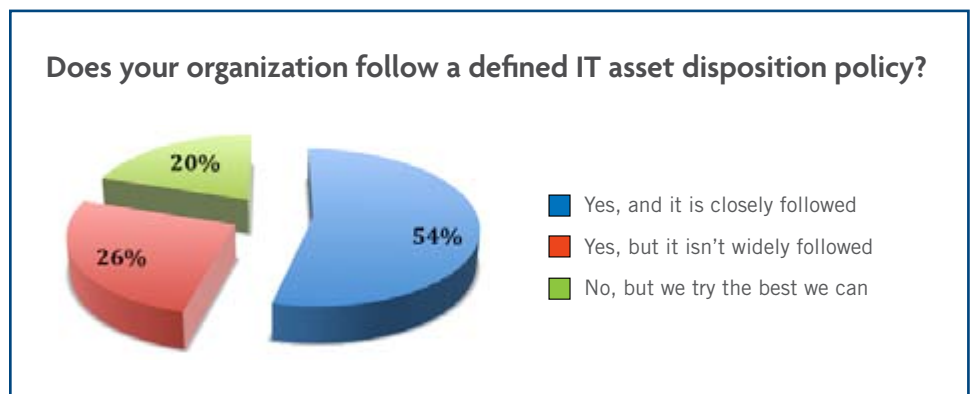
¹ "Statistics on the Management of Used and End-of-Life Electronics," U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, March 13, 2012

A new research study conducted among IT and business professionals indicates that although enterprises seem to have made important strides in their efforts to securely dispose of IT assets, much more work remains to be done in order to maintain legal compliance and ensure efficient and secure business operations. The study, based on 125 responses from registered visitors to SearchDataCenter.com, notes the following:

- While most respondents say their organizations have formal policies for secure IT asset disposition, almost half acknowledge significant compliance gaps.
- IT and business executives are nearly equal in their concern about their organization's ability to properly discard IT assets — and that concern is significant.
- Respondents are more likely to be motivated by avoidance of negative outcomes, such as compliance penalties or proprietary data falling into the wrong hands, than achieving positive outcomes.
- The biggest challenges respondents cite are the costs of asset disposition programs and the perception that the risks associated with their current programs and practices aren't urgent.
- Most respondents at some level use third-party specialists to assist with the disposition of their IT assets, although many again cite costs and lack of a perceived business need as obstacles to increased use of outside experts.

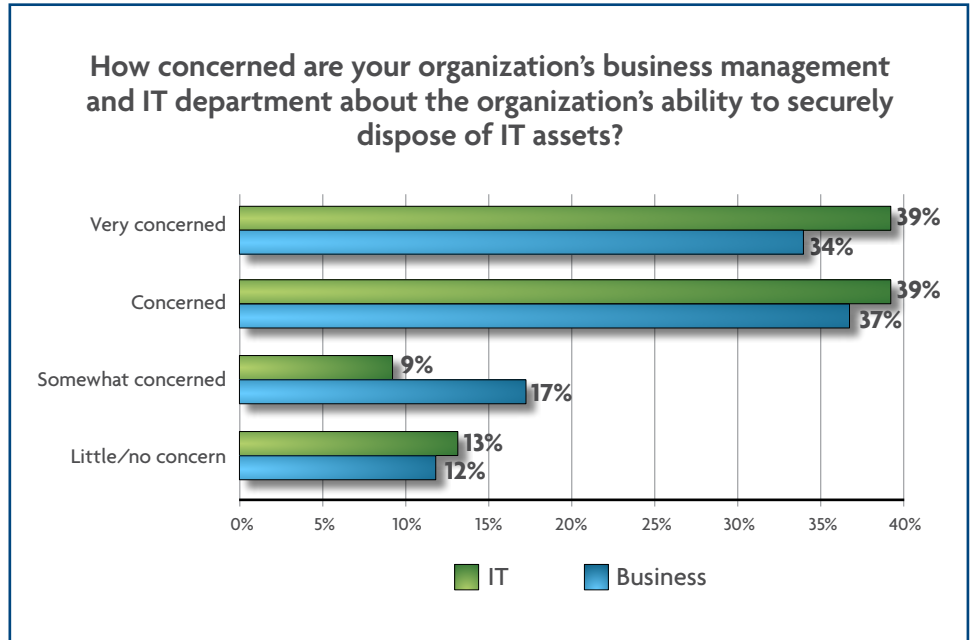
ORGANIZATIONAL PROGRAMS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD RISK

The good news is that the vast majority of respondents — nearly 80% — say their organization has a defined IT asset disposition policy. However, the flip side is that a large group of respondents either admits to compliance gaps or simply tries to deal with the challenge of secure IT asset disposition in an unstructured, ad hoc manner.



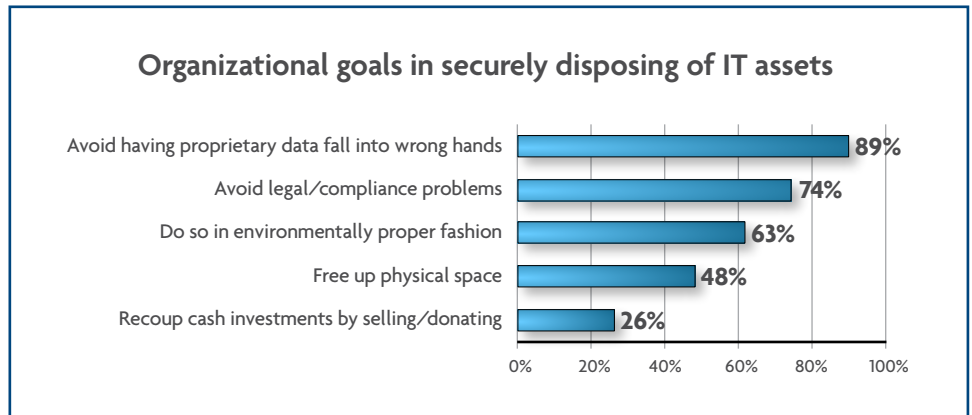
Almost one half (46%) of respondents acknowledge that they either don't have a formal plan in place or that their formal plan isn't widely followed throughout the organization. With the recent downsizing of many organizations' IT staff — the group most likely to be tasked with implementing and overseeing such programs — it seems likely that organizational governance is inadequate largely due to either a lack of information about secure IT asset disposition policies or insufficient oversight in the implementation of those policies.

As such, it's not surprising that both IT organizations and business executives are equally concerned about their organization's ability to securely dispose of IT assets. In fact, about three quarters of both business leaders and their IT counterparts say they are either concerned or very concerned about potential shortcomings in their IT asset disposition programs.

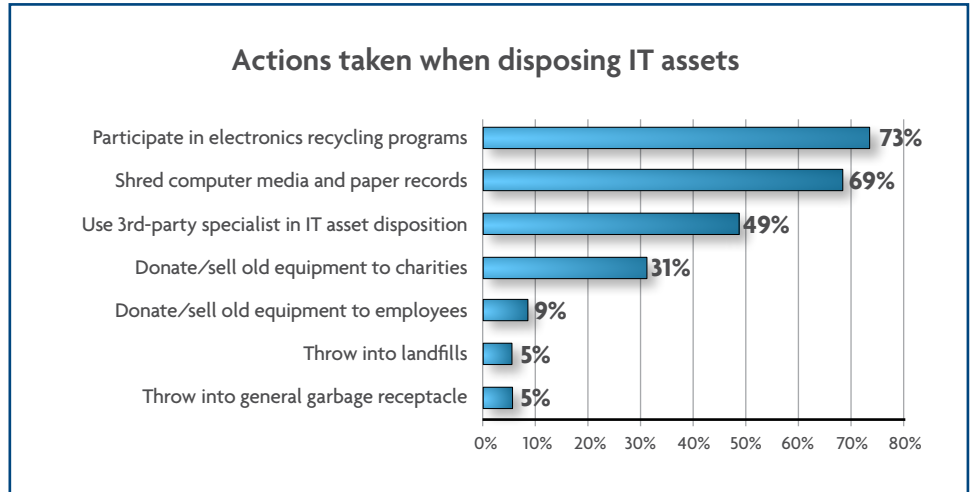


GOALS, ACTIONS AND CHALLENGES

Respondents are motivated by a variety of factors when considering formal programs to securely dispose of IT assets. However, they appear to be more motivated by the need to avoid having something negative happen than by achieving a positive result. At the top of the list of goals: protecting proprietary data and avoiding legal and compliance foul-ups.

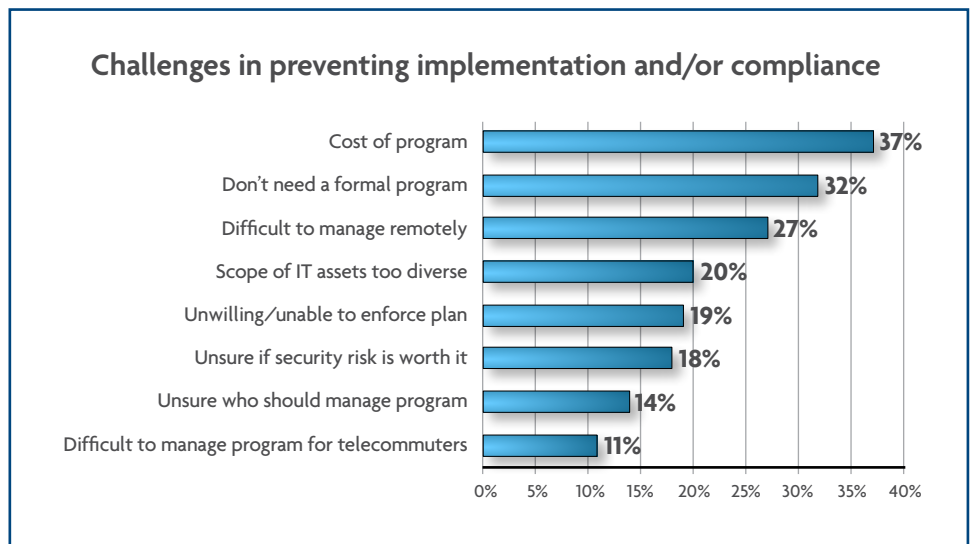


It's not surprising that the top two goals in respondents' IT disposition efforts are based on avoiding negative outcomes, since IT organizations, in particular, have always strived to mitigate risk. However, it's worth noting that 63% of respondents say their organizations are motivated by the desire to dispose of equipment in an environmentally proper manner. That attitude is reinforced when respondents note specific actions their organizations take in IT asset disposition, with participating in electronics recycling programs heading the list.



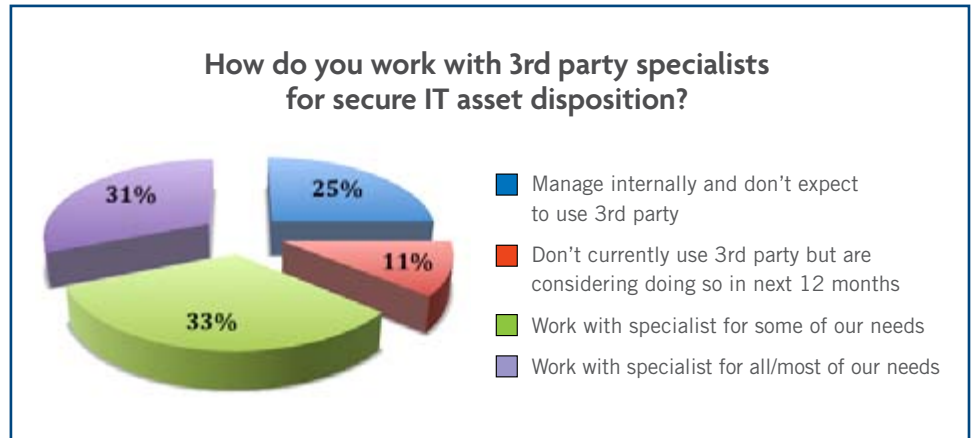
Even though most respondents say their organizations typically take a number of actions designed to minimize risk and improve efficiency when disposing of IT assets, they point to several real-world challenges that make it more difficult to achieve the full range of benefits from such programs.

Topping the list is a familiar complaint: cost. Specifically, respondents say overall cost is the biggest impediment when it comes to putting a formal IT asset disposition program in place and, importantly, ensuring compliance. It's also worth noting that the second most-cited challenge is simply the perceived lack of urgency for implementing such programs: Nearly one-third of respondents say they don't need a formal program because their internal efforts are sufficient.



THIRD-PARTY SPECIALISTS FOR IT ASSET DISPOSITION

As IT organizations increasingly deal with the dual challenges of staff downsizing and increased demand for transformative applications and services, many enterprises have begun using third-party specialists with extensive experience and knowledge in secure disposition of IT assets. Not only do these specialists provide important augmentation of internal resources, but they can also provide critical guidance in developing an overall strategy for IT asset disposition and creating metrics to determine the success of the program.



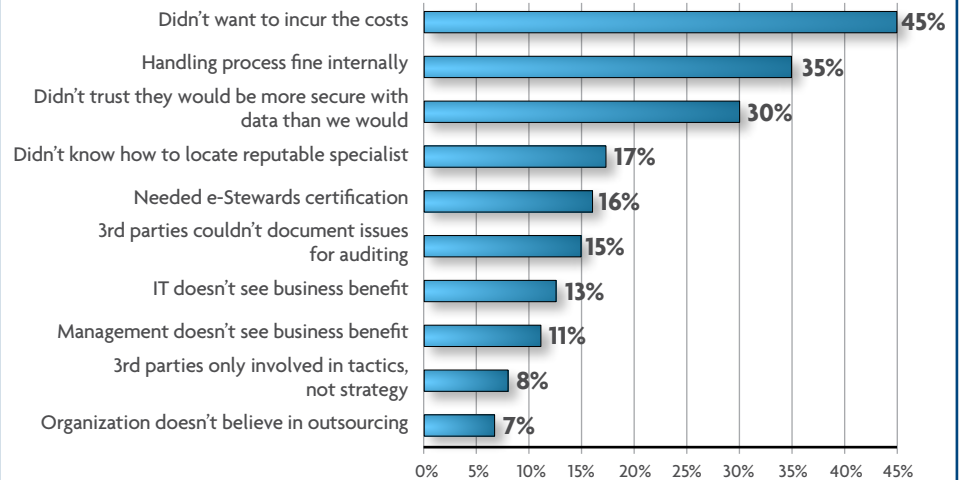
Sixty-four percent of respondents say they use third-party specialists for at least some of their IT asset disposition requirements, while only 11% say they aren't considering working with third parties. When it comes to technology areas most likely to be covered in respondents' agreements with third parties, computer hardware (both data center infrastructure and end-user equipment) is the most likely candidate for outsourced disposition activities.

How likely are you to use a third party to dispose of the following IT assets?

	Very likely	Likely	Somewhat likely	Not likely
Enterprise hardware	34%	21%	19%	26%
End-user hardware	26%	25%	19%	30%
Computer media	25%	19%	22%	34%
Software programs	14%	18%	20%	48%
Proprietary data	29%	20%	18%	33%
Data-bearing office equipment	26%	21%	25%	28%

As is often the case, respondents say their top concern when evaluating a third-party specialist for secure IT asset disposition is cost. In fact, that and the perception that internal efforts are sufficient and therefore a third party is not needed are likely to be more important challenges to overcome than any limitations on the part of third-party organizations themselves.

Concerns when evaluating 3rd parties for secure IT asset disposition



CONCLUSION

Secure disposition of IT assets has taken on added significance across all industries and technology profiles due to a variety of factors, from infrastructure sprawl and proliferation of mission-critical data on a range of devices to complex and growing legal and compliance requirements.

Survey respondents note that while they typically have formal programs in place to handle such issues, they are not always as successful as they need to be in complying with those programs. As such, when it comes to the proper disposal of the growing number of IT assets inside their organization, both IT and business leaders have significant levels of concern about their risk profile.

Respondents also note that their programs are driven primarily by the need to avoid risks such as compliance violations or loss of proprietary data versus achieving tangible benefits such as cost savings. Instead, respondents say cost is what most often makes their organizations hesitant about IT asset disposal programs and using experienced third-party specialists in general, perhaps indicating that a more nuanced view of the financial impact of failing to securely dispose of IT assets is required. In fact, third parties with proven expertise in safely and securely disposing IT assets often can help save money by assessing the value of decommissioned equipment and helping return to the organization a significant portion of those assets' economic value.

