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FINANCIAL SERVICES AND THE
TREASURY BUREAU
(The Treasury Branch)

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9 June 2005

Clerk to the Finance Committee
(Attn: Ms Becky Yu)
Legislative Council Secretariat
Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road
Central
Hong Kong

Dear Ms Yu,

Follow-up to Finance Committee on 27 May 2005

I refer to your letter of 27 May and would like to provide the supplementary information on the established procedure for disposal of surplus computer items and steps taken by the Administration to ensure the protection of data before the disposal of computer items in Appendices A and B respectively. I should be grateful if you would circulate the information to Finance Committee (FC) Members before the FC meeting on 10 June 2005.

Yours sincerely,

(Alfred Fok)
for Secretary for Financial Services
and the Treasury

Procedure for disposal of surplus computer items

The HKSAR Government has an established procedure for disposal of surplus government stores including computing equipment.

General Stores

2.   Generally, when a surplus store is identified, departments should ascertain whether it is serviceable or not.   For the store which is considered as unserviceable, i.e. unsuitable for use either because it is worn out or broken down and is certified to be beyond economical repair or it is technically obsolete, departments will consider whether the surplus store has any residual value of some kind (e.g. for display, training or preservation). If the surplus store has such residual value, departments are required to follow the disposal procedure described in paragraph 3 below. If the surplus store has no such residual value, but contains commercial residual value, departments may sell it to the contractor of disposal term contract, or, in the absence of a disposal term contract, sell it by auction or tender through the Director of Government Logistics.

3.   For surplus serviceable stores or unserviceable stores with residual value as mentioned in paragraph 2 above, departments are required to inform the Director of Government Logistics who will post the information on the surplus stores list on Government's intranet. Other departments may bid for the surplus stores if they want them. In case no department indicates interest in these surplus stores, departments may consider disposing of them either by commercial disposal (i.e. selling by auction or tender arranged through the Director of Government Logistics or to the disposal term contractor), or by donation to non-government organizations established solely or principally for educational, scientific, cultural or charitable purposes provided that the donated stores are for non-profit making purpose and that there is no consequential capital or recurrent expenditure implications on the Government. As a last resort and if the value of the surplus stores concerned is so low that it renders commercial disposal not cost effective, departments may dispose of them by dumping.

Computer Items

4.   In respect of surplus computer items, departments are required to erase the records and data installed in the computer in accordance with the guidelines of the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer before arranging for their disposal. Departments are required to consider the option of trade-in when planning for the disposal of surplus computer items and before procurement of new computer equipment. For surplus computer items that are

not suitable for trade-in for various reasons such as its low value or unfavourable trade-in terms, departments should consider the option of donation or commercial disposal by means of auction or tender or by selling them to the contractor of Sale Contract of Used /Unserviceable Microcomputers and Accessories arranged by the Government Logistics Department. The tender document for the Sale Contract of Used/Unserviceable Microcomputers and Accessories has specifically required the contractor to comply with the relevant environmental legislation/regulations to ensure the computer items will not be disposed of indiscriminately.

Protection of data stored in government computers

The Government has strict regulations, guidelines and procedures for Government bureaux and departments (B/Ds) to follow on proper disposal of computer equipment. The Security Regulations (SR) provides clear guidelines and requirements on the handling of government information. B/Ds should refer to the regulations with regard to destruction of classified information stored in information systems. All classified information stored in information systems should be completely cleared from the storage media before disposal or re-use. If for any reason this is not feasible, the media unit must be physically destroyed to prevent the recovery of the classified information.

2.   The Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) is responsible for overseeing government-wide IT security policy and practices by providing technical advice and guidance to B/Ds in respect of the protection of government information systems. The 'Guidelines on IT Security' promulgated by OGCIO advises B/Ds to follow the necessary steps below to ensure the secure deletion of information before the disposal or re-use of their computer equipment –

- Users should check whether classified information had previously been processed and/or kept in the computer. If in doubt, it should be assumed that it had;

- Users should acquire appropriate secure deletion software to completely clear or erase all the classified information in the computer; and

- B/Ds should maintain a system of checks and balances to verify its successful completion of the secure deletion process.

3.   Furthermore, OGCIO has published related documents such as technical notes for SR, technical papers on disposal of computer equipment with classified information and frequently asked questions at the Central Cyber Government Office for B/Ds' reference. OGCIO also regularly reminds B/Ds the proper procedure for disposal / re-use of computer equipment.

4.   The prevailing methods for erasure of data recommended by OGCIO are overwriting and degaussing data. Overwriting is to apply appropriate number of passes of replacing the existing data with characters using suitable patterns. Degaussing is a method to magnetically erase data from magnetic

media by exposing it to a strong magnetic field. Degaussing will always turn hard disks non-functional. This is because the strong magnetic field will destroy the servo and maintenance information on the platters, which controls the movement of the read/write head assembly and the drive's rotation speed. Degaussing usually takes much less time than overwriting. For storage media that cannot be sanitized by means of the above methods, physical destruction would be required.