Data center decommissioning checklist

Servers, storage and networking, in seven phases from the first inventory to the final certificate. Assign an owner and date to each line so nothing falls between teams.

Project / site	Owner	Deadline

01 Plan the scope and the deadline

	TASK	OWNER	DATE
☐	Define scope: which sites, rooms, racks or cages, and which equipment stays		
☐	Confirm the hard deadline and any notice periods in leases or colocation contracts		
☐	Name an owner for each area: IT operations, security, facilities, finance and procurement		
☐	Agree the budget and how recovered value will be credited or reported		
☐	List approvals you need, such as change control, security sign-off or asset write-off		
☐	Check building rules early: loading dock hours, elevator reservations, insurance certificates and escort requirements		

02 Inventory and reconcile every asset

	TASK	OWNER	DATE
☐	Record asset tag, manufacturer, model, serial number and location (site, room, rack, U) for each device		
☐	Capture part numbers and key configuration: CPUs, GPUs, memory modules, drives and network cards		
☐	Flag every device that stores data, including servers, storage arrays, switches with configs, and loose drives		
☐	Photograph labels on anything you can't identify. A label photo is often enough to price it		
☐	Note condition and anything missing or known to be faulty		
☐	Reconcile the walk-through against your records and resolve the differences before removal starts		

03 Migrate workloads and shut systems down

	TASK	OWNER	DATE
☐	Confirm workloads, data and services have moved and been tested on the new platform		
☐	Take and verify final backups, and decide how long they are retained		
☐	Remove systems from DNS, load balancers, monitoring, backup jobs and alerting		
☐	Revoke credentials, certificates and service accounts tied to the hardware		
☐	Cancel or transfer support contracts, warranties and software licenses		
☐	Update the CMDB status so nobody brings a retired system back online by mistake		
☐	Power down in a planned order		
☐	Hold retired systems isolated or powered down for an agreed period before removal, then label each device as cleared		
☐	For virtual servers, delete snapshots, templates, backups and detached volumes, and release IPs and licenses		

04 Decide how each device's data will be sanitized

	TASK	OWNER	DATE
☐	Write down which level applies to each device type, based on your data classification policy		
☐	Decide whether sanitization happens on-site, off-site, or both		
☐	Remember drives inside servers, arrays and appliances, not just loose drives		
☐	Match the technique to the media type: reformatting or deleting files is not sanitization		
☐	Reset network gear, BMCs and controllers, and pull SD cards and USB boot media		
☐	Require a record for each device with its serial number, method used and verification result		
☐	Keep a chain-of-custody record from the moment devices leave the rack		

> **Clear** protects against simple recovery; hardware can be reused. **Purge** makes recovery infeasible even with lab methods; hardware can usually be reused. **Destroy** physically destroys the media. (NIST SP 800-88 Rev. 2, September 2025.)

05 Remove, pack and ship

	TASK	OWNER	DATE
☐	Schedule de-racking, cable removal and packing around access windows		
☐	Protect floors, doorways and elevators, and keep exit paths clear		
☐	Pack hardware so it arrives in the condition it left in. Loose GPUs and memory need anti-static packaging		
☐	Seal and number pallets or containers, and list contents against serial numbers		
☐	Use tracked freight and record who handled each shipment and when		
☐	Confirm the receiving count matches what shipped		

06 Recover value from what can be resold

	TASK	OWNER	DATE
☐	Separate equipment with resale value from true end-of-life equipment		
☐	Keep GPUs, HGX baseboards, heatsinks and brackets together where possible		
☐	Keep memory modules grouped by part number, not mixed in bins		
☐	Get a written offer that states what it's based on and the date of the market it reflects		
☐	Agree how payment, timing and any condition adjustments will work before hardware ships		

07 Close out and document

	TASK	OWNER	DATE
☐	Reconcile serial numbers on certificates and receiving reports against your original inventory		
☐	Chase down any device that is missing from the paperwork		
☐	File certificates, chain-of-custody records and settlement documents where auditors can find them		
☐	Update the CMDB and fixed asset register, and record write-offs		
☐	Do a final walk-through of the space and return badges, keys and access		
☐	Note what slowed you down, so the next decommission goes faster		

Retiring hardware? Handled buys surplus servers, GPUs, server RAM, storage and networking, and coordinates de-racking, freight, chain of custody and data handling. Send a rough list to hello@handledinfra.com.

handledinfra.com

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