

Your digital clutter has a carbon footprint

New Earth Day 2026 report from CleanMyMac by MacPaw on digital habits, emotional clutter, and why environmental awareness can change behaviour for Earth Day



CleanMyMac
by MacPaw

Intro

Earth Day is April 22.

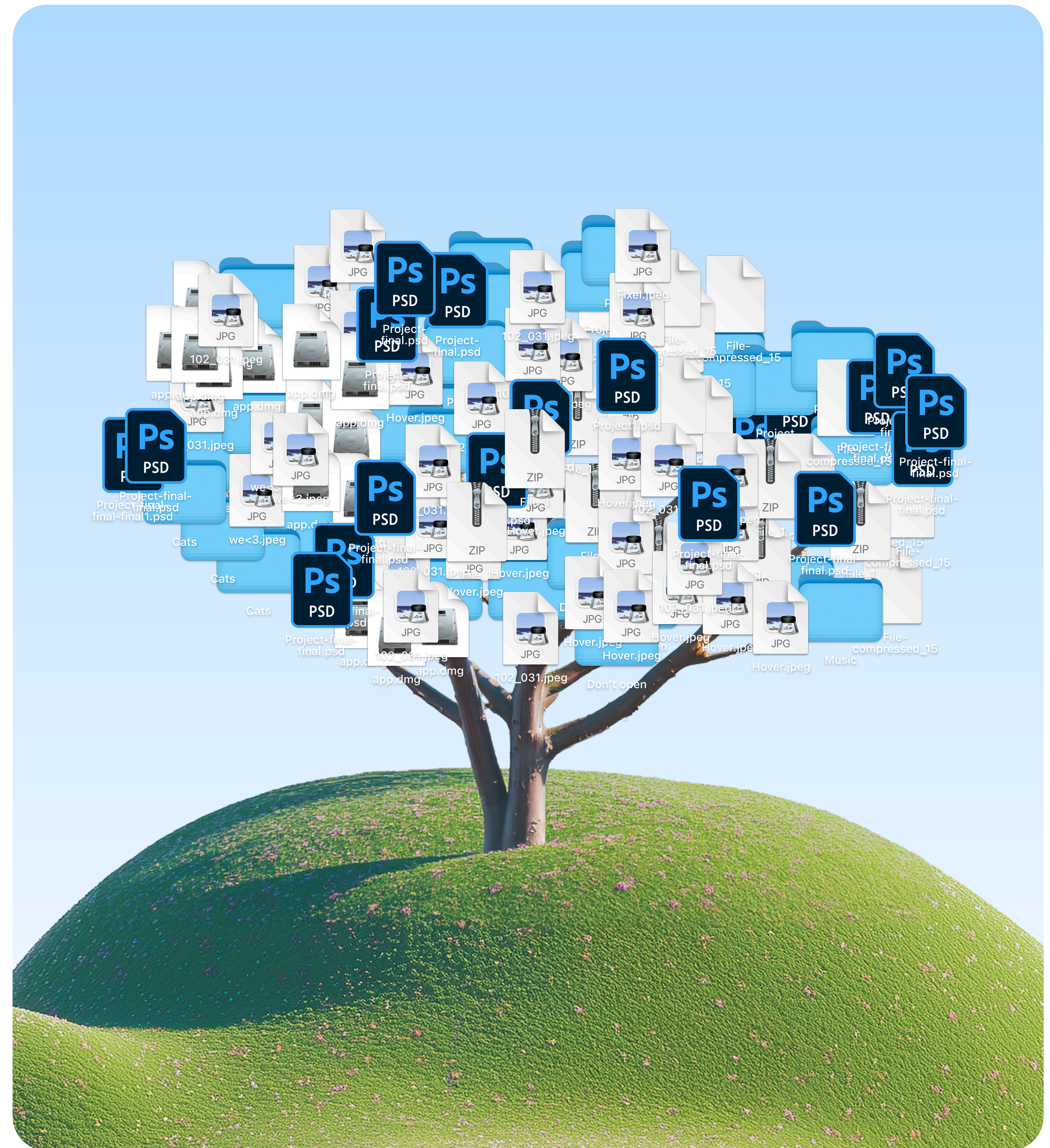
Since 1970, it's been a moment for people around the world to pause and think about the planet they share — and what small actions, taken together, might actually matter.

At MacPaw, we make tools for the way people really work. That means **we care about the spaces people spend their lives in** — physical and digital. This year, we wanted to understand what's actually sitting inside our devices, what it costs us, and whether knowing that changes anything.

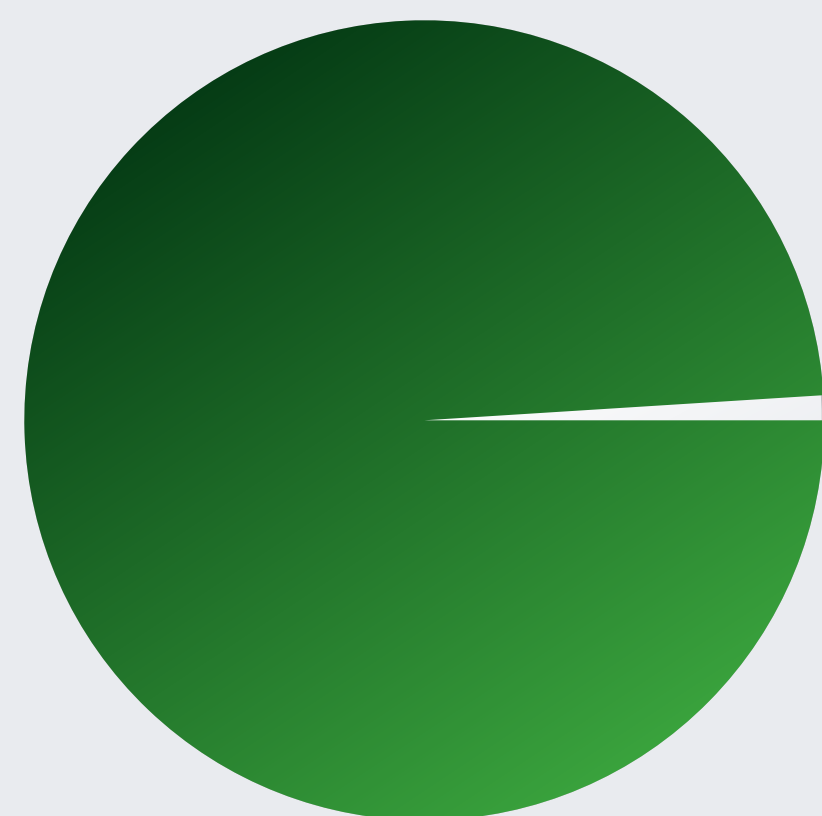
We surveyed Mac users in the US about the files they keep, why they keep them, and what happens when they find out those files don't just sit there.

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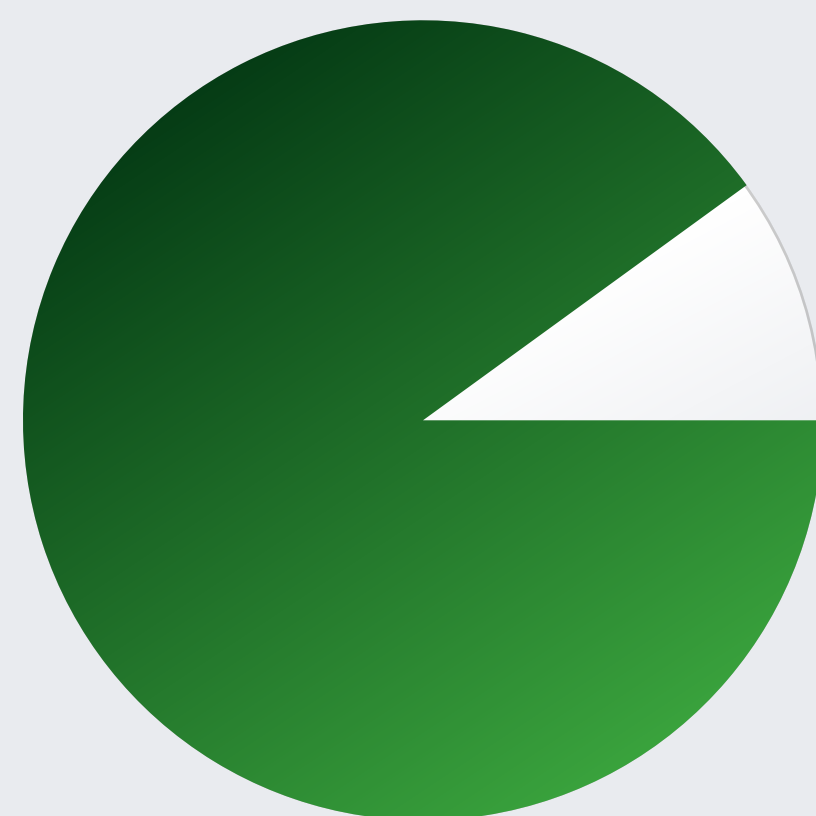


The “dark data” still needs power, cooling, and servers



99%

of all data ever created was made in the last 12 years.



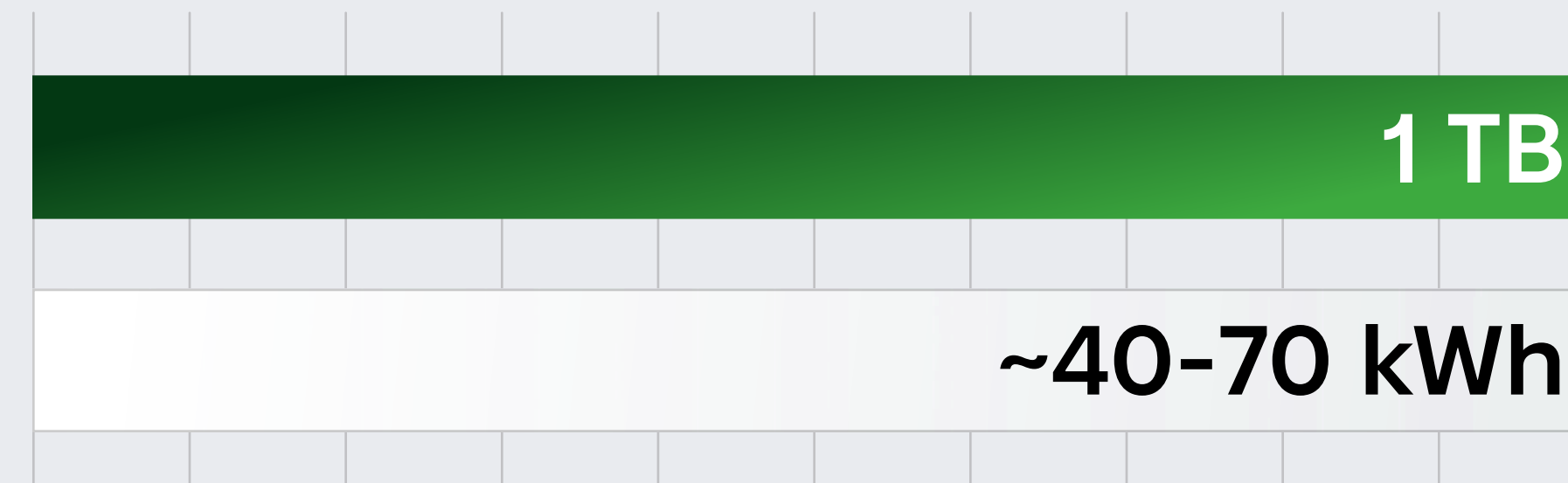
90%

of it is never opened again after three months.

That data doesn't disappear.

It sits on a server somewhere — drawing electricity, generating heat, requiring cooling — indefinitely.

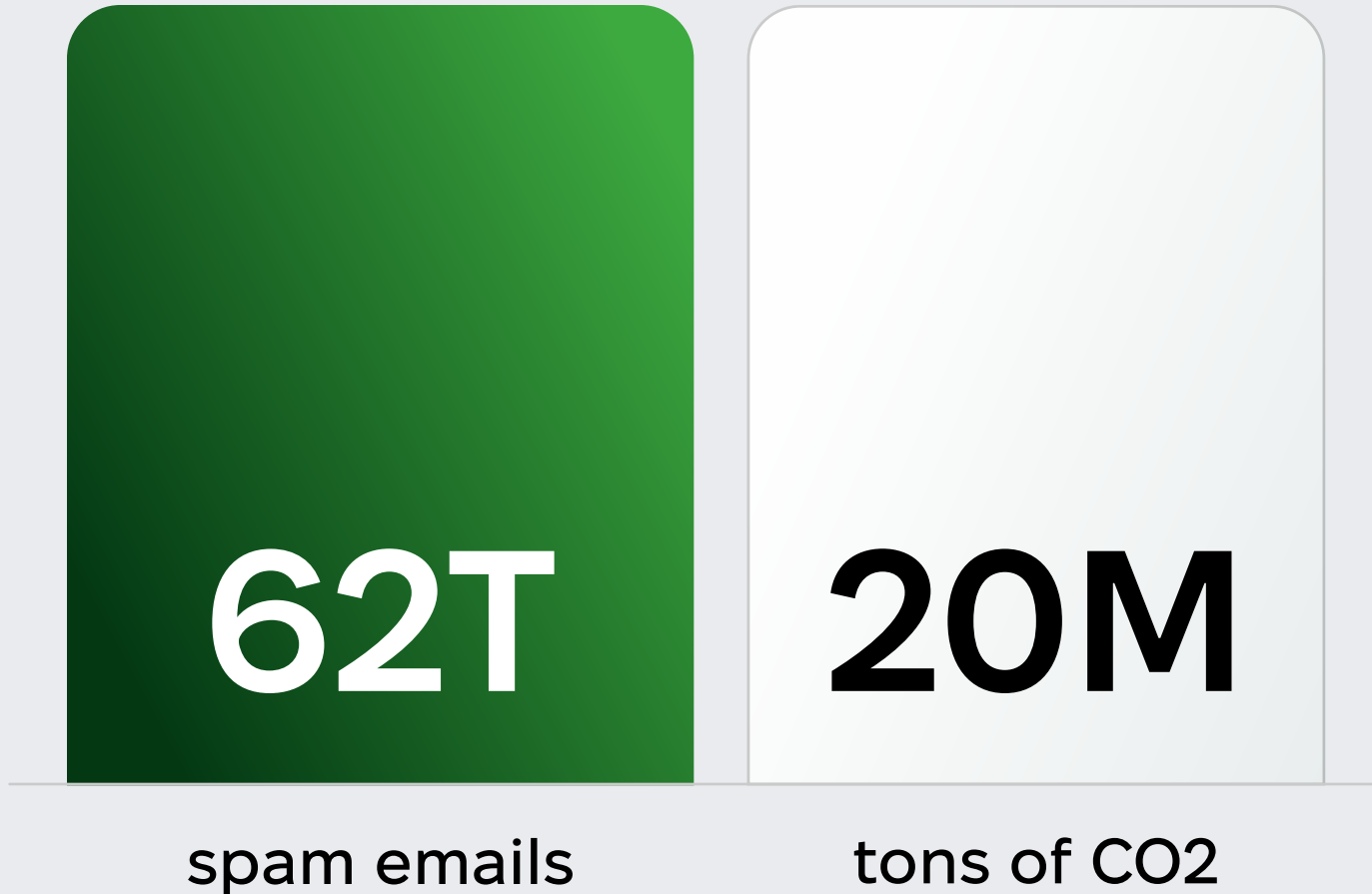
Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec



Data centres alone consume hundreds of terawatt-hours of electricity each year. Keeping 1TB of data in the cloud for a year uses roughly 40–70 kWh — about the same energy as running a fridge for weeks.

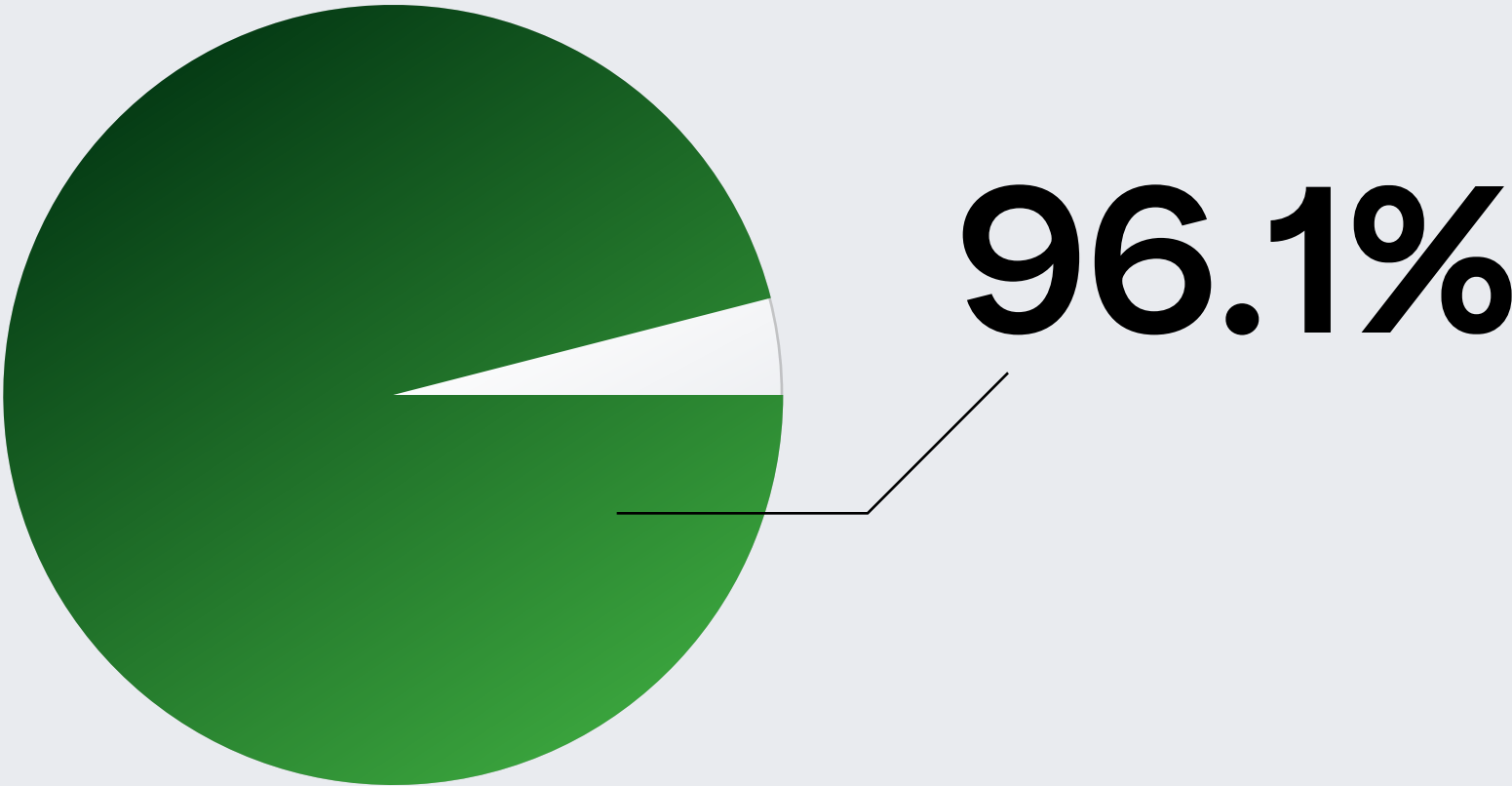
Every file you save is physically stored somewhere. It just doesn't feel that way.

Time to end the invisible mess that visibly breaks the vibe



320 billion emails are sent every day. 62 trillion of those are spam — generating an estimated 20 million tonnes of CO₂ annually.

One email emits, on average, 4g of CO₂. The carbon footprint of a light bulb left on for 6 minutes.



Nearly all adult Mac users in the US store files in the cloud at least sometimes — 96.1% of the people we surveyed.

Which means this isn't a niche problem. It's built into how we all work, every day.

Who we asked and what we wanted to understand

This report is based on a survey of **1000 Mac users** conducted in February 2026. We asked about their digital storage habits, cleanup behaviour, emotional reactions to clutter, and their attitudes toward the environmental cost of unnecessary files.

The sample was designed to be representative of the general population of Mac users in the United States, reflecting the distribution of age groups and gender among adults aged 18–64. Some findings refer specifically to participants who said they use cloud storage.



Sample

1000 Mac users

Fieldwork

Feb 20-27, 2026

Location

USA

Method

Online survey

Smart cleanup for imperfect digital lives

Digital clutter doesn't arrive all at once. It accumulates through habits that feel completely ordinary — a screenshot here, a download there, a desktop that slowly becomes a parking lot.

More than half of Mac users in the US often leave many browser tabs open. More than half save files to the desktop and deal with them later. About half take screenshots they rarely look at again.

50.8%

Take screenshots they rarely look at again

53%

Often leave many browser tabs open

39.4%

Keep outdated tickets, receipts, and documents, even when they're no longer relevant

52.9%

Use the desktop as a "deal with it later" zone

35.3%

Delete files but don't empty the Bin right away

Old photos, forgotten screenshots, emails from 2019 and other cabinets of curiosities

Ask someone to describe their digital clutter and they'll struggle. But ask them what's on their hard drive — they know exactly.

7 in 10 Mac users in the US keep old photos even if they haven't used them in over a year. Around 2 in 3 keep old documents. Nearly 6 in 10 keep screenshots they no longer need.

70.7%

Old photos

67.6%

Old documents

57.6%

Screenshots

56.7%

Old emails

54.8%

Old videos

44.2%

Old Downloads folder files

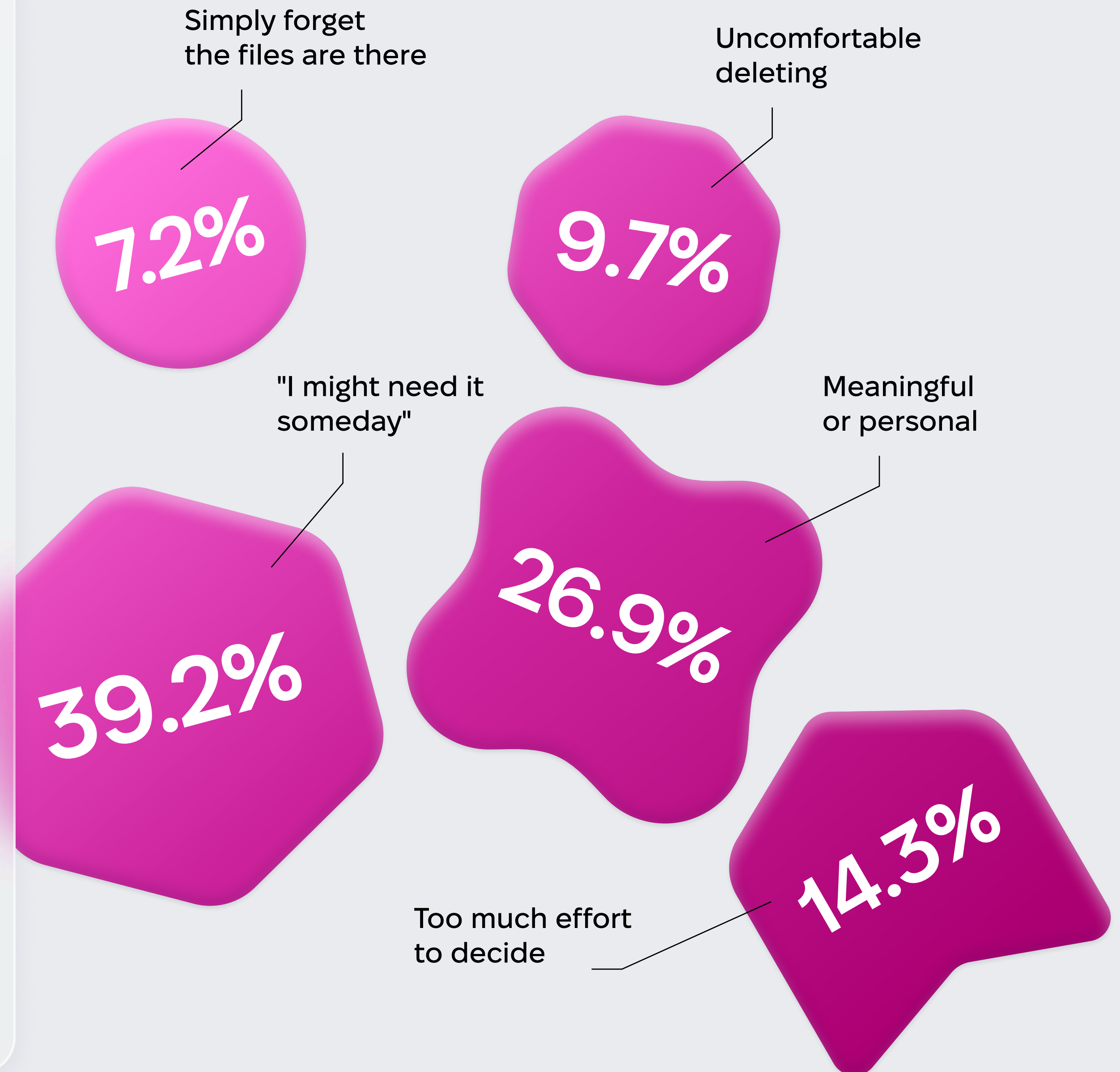
"I might need it someday"

You won't miss what you don't need anymore.

The biggest reason people hold onto digital clutter isn't laziness. It's hope.

39.2% say they keep files because they might need them someday. Around a quarter keep files because they feel meaningful or personal. About 1 in 7 say cleanup stalls because deciding what to delete takes too much effort.

Digital clutter isn't a character flaw. It's a very human response to uncertainty.



When the mess disappears, the tension goes with it

3 in 5 Mac users in the US feel stressed or concerned when their storage starts running out. That low-storage alert isn't just a technical notification — for most people, it carries real weight.

And the flip side is just as real: more than 8 in 10 somewhat or strongly agree that cleaning up their digital space brings relief and mental clarity. It's not just storage that gets freed up.



61.1%

feel stressed or concerned when storage runs low (stressed: 21.5% / concerned but not stressed: 39.6%).



81%

somewhat or strongly agree cleaning up brings relief and mental clarity.

Delete for good — feel good for real

When asked what they'd choose for a 20-minute reset, more than **1 in 2** Mac users in the US picked a digital cleanup task — deleting old photos, organizing the desktop, or clearing out a cluttered inbox, if it would be streamlined and easy to follow for them.

23.8%

Unsubscribe from junk emails / organize inbox

55.5%

Combined cleanup preference

31.7%

Delete old photos / organize desktop



Clean without breaking things

The biggest reason people avoid cleanup? Well, those who clean at least once a month, fear of deleting the wrong thing — **29%** of respondents say so. About **1 in 5** delay because their Mac still works fine, so urgency doesn't feel real. For about **1 in 6**, cleanup just feels tedious enough to keep putting off. Understanding the barrier is the first step past it.



Fear of deleting something important	29%
Mac works fine / no urgency	19.7%
Cleanup feels tedious or boring	16.6%
Not enough time	10.4%
Not sure what's safe to remove	9.2%

Things you can't forget bring you change

This is the finding that surprised us most.

More than **8 out of 10** Mac users in the US who store files in any cloud service say that if a Mac maintenance app showed the estimated environmental impact, it would be somewhat too helpful for them when deciding whether to keep or delete files. **7 out of 10** say they would clean their cloud storage more often after learning about the environmental impact of digital cleaning. And nearly **1 in 3** say they would clean much more often.

The information isn't the obstacle.
The information is the opening.

84.3%

Environmental impact info would be moderately to extremely useful for them to decide what to keep or delete

71.7%

Would clean old cloud files more often if they knew the cost

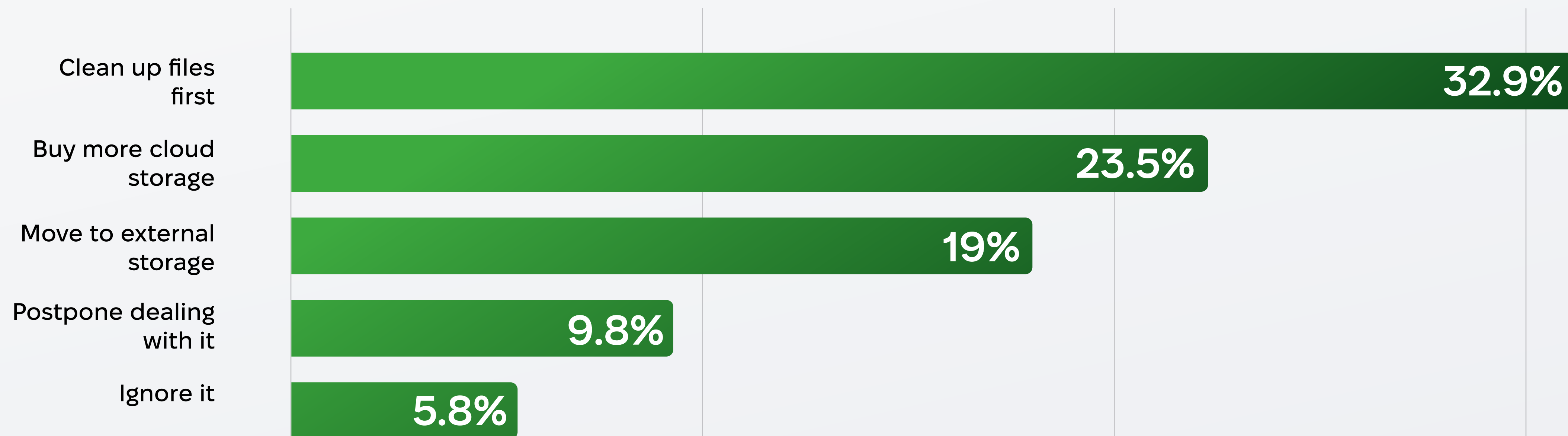
31.1%

Would clean much more often

Less stored data = less energy burned

When Mac users in the US hit a storage problem, their first instinct is to fix it themselves. About **1 in 3** of those who've ever seen a notification like "Startup Disk Almost Full" or "iCloud Storage Full" clean up files first. Nearly **1 in 4** buy more cloud storage. About **1 in 5** move files to external storage.

The cleanup impulse is already there. It just needs a clearer reason to act earlier — before the warning light comes on.



Our planet. Our power.
Our files.

Earth Day

7 in 10 Mac users in the US say they'd clean their cloud storage more often if they understood the environmental cost. You're reading this, so now you do.

Your files don't disappear when you stop using them. But they can — and clearing them out is one of the smallest, most satisfying things you can do for yourself and for the world you share.

Our Power, Our Planet — Earth Day 2026



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