

# Terminated worker won't return property

*The problem:* A terminated employee fails to return company equipment, such as a laptop. How do you get it back? You have different options to consider, depending on your state's laws.

**1. Deduct the cost of the item from the employee's final paycheck.** Be careful here. Most states require employees to authorize such paycheck deductions in advance. You may be able to make signing such an authorization a condition of employment when the employee starts working for you. Check your state's laws before going this route.

**2. Do not pay out accrued vacation time** until after the item has been returned. Again, check state law on vacation pay upon termination first.

**3. Require the employee to come to the office** to pick up his final paycheck, at which time he is to return the item. Note: If the employee does not show up, you can't hold onto the check.

**4. Send a letter requesting return of the item** or a check for the amount of the item by a specific date. Warn that you will go to local authorities or to small claims court if necessary.

**Final tip:** When employees are hired or given company equipment, create a checklist to review. Have employees sign it as an acknowledgment of receiving the property and of their duty to return it upon their termination.