

Destroying Non-Archival Records: Methods for Destroying Electronic Records

Purpose: Provide further guidance to state and local government agencies (in addition to [chapter 434-640 WAC](#)) on methods for destroying non-archival electronic records which have met their minimum retention period.

When destroying electronic records, there are two key considerations:

1. **Does the destruction render the records unreadable?**
2. **Is the destruction method appropriate for the sensitivity/confidentiality level of the records?**

One size does not always fit all, so when choosing the most suitable method of destroying electronic records, their sensitivity/confidentiality level(s) must be considered.

Records that are exempt from public disclosure and/or otherwise considered confidential must remain secure during the destruction process and must be reduced to an illegible condition in accordance with [WAC 434-640-020](#).

Common methods of destroying electronic records:

- **Deleting** – The simplest, easiest and most appropriate method for non-sensitive/non-confidential records is to simply hit the delete key. Remember that deleting is not exactly the same as destroying the record; it just destroys the access to the record. The actual “1’s” and “0’s” may continue to exist on the storage medium until they are overwritten – and can be recovered using digital forensics.
- **Overwriting** – A more effective method of destroying electronic records is to use software that overwrites the records multiple times (up to 10 times) with strings of “1’s” and “0’s”. This makes the possibility that the records can be recovered much more remote than simply hitting the delete key.
- **Degaussing (Magnetic Media)** – Exposing magnetic media (such as tapes and floppy disks) to a powerful magnetic field to scramble the data. It may take multiple passes of the magnet over the storage media to ensure that the records are properly destroyed.
- **Physically Destroying Storage Media** – Actually physically destroying the storage media may be the most appropriate destruction method for the most sensitive/confidential records. It may also be the most appropriate method of destroying records stored on portable media, such as shredding CDs and DVDs, cutting up old floppy disks, etc.

**Additional advice regarding the management of public records is available from
Washington State Archives:**

www.sos.wa.gov/archives
recordsmanagement@sos.wa.gov