

### Destroying Non-Archival Records: Methods for Destroying Paper Records

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

When destroying paper 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 paper 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](#).

[WAC 434-640-030](#) outlines the following conditions when destroying records by recycling:

- 1) Prompt destruction of the records is ensured;
- 2) The recycling agent/entity has any required licenses and is insured or bonded;
- 3) The records are not unattended and unprotected as they await destruction; and,
- 4) The agency has a contract or written agreement in effect with the recycling entity which includes the above conditions.

#### Common methods of destroying paper records:

- **Straight-cut Shredding** – Simple cutting of paper into thin vertical strips. This is appropriate for most non-confidential records. However, it is easier to reassemble and/or still read portions of the original record than cross-cut shredding.
- **Cross-cut Shredding** – Paper is cut into small confetti-sized pieces. Washington State Archives recommends this form of shredding for sensitive/confidential paper records.
- **Recycling/Pulping** – Paper is mixed with water and chemicals to break it down into a mixture of strands of cellulose called pulp which can then be recycled into other paper products.
- **Shredding and Pulping** – A combination of shredding the records first and then pulping is a more certain method of destroying paper records. Records destroyed on behalf of state agencies by the State Records Center Warehouse are destroyed using this method.

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