

## Health Information Compliance Alert

### READER QUESTION: Trashing Hard Copies? Not So Fast

**Question:** How should our medical practice dispose of hard copies of files?

Missouri Subscriber

**Answer:** There's no debate here; shredding is the only answer, says **Megan Hardy**, CMM, office manager with the **Poronsky Family Practice** in Palos Heights, Ill. Hardy advises medical practices to shred anything with patients' names on it.

"Depending on the size of your practice," she adds, "you might even need to hire a shredding service. We started doing it in-house, with a couple of shredders of our own, but quickly burned out the shredders from so much use."

If that seems like a lot of trouble, Hardy says appearances don't deceive. "But as horror stories accumulate -- from tales of boxed medical files falling out of the beds of pickup trucks to accounts of boxed medical files sitting in parking lots alongside dumpsters, it's clearly the right preventive measure."

Hardy adds that if your shredding service does a lousy job disposing of your documents, you're the one who'll be held accountable. But don't fret, she says. "One way to know what you're paying for is to hire a service that will drive its trucks to your office and shred your documents onsite, while you wait.

Make sure your service is HIPAA-compliant, and remember that most of the horror stories involve a low-cost or 'cut-rate' shredding service."