West Virginia Executive Branch
Privacy Tip

Protecting Personally Identifiable Information (PII)



PII is defined as information that identifies, or can be used to identify, locate, contact, or impersonate a particular individual. PII also includes protected health information (PHI). Examples of PII include social security numbers, driver's license numbers, financial account numbers, or credit/debit card numbers. Here are a few tips on protecting PII in the office.

Mail

- Interoffice mail:
  - Send in a confidential envelope.
  - Follow-up to verify that the recipient received the information.
- Postal mail ("snail mail"):
  - When possible, use registered mail or a traceable delivery service (like UPS).
  - Ensure that only the name and address are visible on the envelope.
  - Use heavy-weight envelopes that make it hard to read the contents of letters or documents.
- Email:
  - Double-check the recipient's address before sending.
  - Encrypt email.

Faxing

- Outgoing faxes:
  - Verify recipient's fax number prior to sending PII.
  - Use a fax transmittal sheet.
  - Follow-up to verify the fax was received.
- Incoming faxes:
  - Quickly retrieve faxes transmitted to you.
  - Secure faxes that have not been retrieved.
  - If you are expecting a fax and have not received it, follow-up to ensure the sender has the correct fax number.

Desks and countertops

- Don't leave documents containing PII visible on desks or counters when not in use.
- Store documents in a locked filing cabinet whenever the area is left unattended (such as lunch time or after hours).

Note: Your agency/bureau/department/division may have specific requirements – always check your policies and procedures. If you have questions, contact your Privacy Officer.