West Virginia Executive Branch
Privacy Tip

More Shredding Tips

As you know, the Privacy Office occasionally issues tips to assist you in making informed decisions in your "away from work" life. The following tip is for that purpose.

Identity theft is increasing rapidly, and criminals are taking advantage of information that could possibly be in your curbside trash. "Dumpster diving" is a common tactic used by ID thieves. Shredding might be inconvenient, but it is absolutely necessary. It is a fundamental way to protect your identity.

What should you shred?
You should also shred anything that comes in the mail with your name and/or address on it, such as pre-approved credit card offers and address labels you aren't planning on using.
Many bills, credit card receipts, bank transaction receipts, etc. can be shredded after a period of months or years. The Better Business Bureau (BBB) offers a recommended record retention list for personal documents here:
http://www.bbb.org/globalassets/local-bbbs/council-113/media/secure-your-id-day/records-retention-schedule.pdf

How should you shred?
Use a cross-cut, diamond-cut or confetti shredder for the most secure shreds. It's nearly impossible to tape together a document that has been shredded this way. One that shreds in strips can not only be put back together easily, but if used incorrectly, the documents could have entire strips that are readable.
If you are recycling your shredded documents, consider doing it over several weeks, so all of your sensitive information doesn't go all at once.
Organizations like AARP and the BBB occasionally hold shredding events where you can bring all your old documents to be shredded. Watch for notifications in local newspapers.

Going "paperless" by having your bills, bank statements, and credit card statements delivered electronically will save you from having all of those documents in files and drawers in your house. But remember – even if you've signed up for this service, someone could send you a "phishing" email that looks official. Don't click on links in email – access your account only through a verified address.

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