

SECURITY Smart™ BRIEFING

SAFEGUARDING YOUR SECURITY AND PRIVACY AT WORK AND AT HOME

Closing Time? Cleaning Time!

At the end of a long day, do you arrange everything in your work area in a neat pile, chuck the unneeded papers into the recycling bin, power down your equipment, and head home for the night thinking you've cleaned up properly? If so, you're like many of us who think a tidy space equals a clean space. But in the world of security, a truly clean workspace is one that doesn't leave sensitive information exposed. Stephen Northcutt, president of the SANS Technology Institute, which offers information security training, certification and research, has the following advice for protecting sensitive information at work.

1 Hide your paperwork. At a minimum, any printed or handwritten sensitive information should be stored out of sight so that it cannot be viewed by someone walking through the area. If you can keep those materials under lock and key, even better. It can also be a good idea to scan paper items and file them electronically.

2 Check your computer(s). You shouldn't leave digital media such as CDs or USB sticks in a computer or on a desk. Also remember to lock up or bring home portable devices such as laptops or PDAs.

3 Think twice before you recycle.

Organizations are often pretty good at managing desk areas and removing information posted in conference rooms after a meeting, but the trash and recycling bins are easy targets for so-called Dumpster divers. Do your part by shredding sensitive information according to your company's policies.

4 Consider personal information, too.

"In various workplaces, I have found prescriptions and discarded medicine bottles with the labels, bank statements, and the occasional personal mail," says Northcutt. Don't toss any items or documents that you wouldn't be comfortable having a stranger read.

5 Keep your workspace clean throughout the day.

Be aware each time you step away from your desk, not just when you're heading home. When you know you'll be gone for an extended period, such as a lunch break, lock your door. If you don't have a door, lock up sensitive information.

6 Remember to meet company-specific policies.

Clean-desk policies are typically explained during orientation and training procedures. What's your policy? Ask your manager or your security department if you don't know. These protocols are created for good reasons—make sure to follow them.

"Ask yourself what a person with 20/20 eyesight and good short-term memory could learn about your organization's sensitive information if they were able to spend any time at all wandering around."

**—Stephen Northcutt, president,
SANS Technology Institute**