

information destruction **frequently asked** questions



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Why use an information destruction company?

Every business possesses data that could potentially cause a problem if it falls into the wrong hands. Such data includes: customer records, marketing plans, financial reports, payroll data, costings, product information, personnel details, computer hard disks and CD/DVDs.

The requirements of the Data Protection Act are stringent and companies could face criminal action and large fines if they are not deemed to have acted responsibly in relation to destruction of confidential waste.

Society is increasingly focusing on personal privacy and wider confidentiality which means that there is greater scrutiny of businesses' performance in relation to these issues. Perceived shortcomings in this area can lead to damaged reputation.

Information destruction companies can advise companies on all these areas and take the necessary arrangements to ensure that information is destroyed properly.

What happens without effective information destruction?

If a business disposes of its waste with its normal rubbish, it runs the risk of becoming a victim of bin-raiding. Bin-raiding involves a criminal rummaging through the rubbish of a business or individual in order to source and then misuse confidential information.

For example, recent media coverage has highlighted that a number of high street banks have contravened security procedures by putting their customers' personal information in their normal rubbish. Such information includes account details and customers' full names, addresses and dates of birth.

Such activity puts customers at serious risk of identity theft. Identity theft involves criminals using personal information to fraudulently open bank accounts or to obtain passports and driving licenses in someone else's name amongst other misuses. For more information on identity theft visit the Home Office's website on the subject www.identitytheft.org.uk

Why is professional information destruction essential?

The Data Protection Act means that companies have legal obligations to destroy confidential material responsibly. This involves destroying under secure conditions any data containing personal information including name, address, financial and legal details. The Act covers all forms of confidential material including computer records, information held as hard copies such as paper records, and information held on discs and CDs.

Each company must have a data control policy and use processing methods that indicate they are employing appropriate methods to prevent unlawful processing/disclosure of data, and accidental loss, destruction of, or damage to, personal data.

In terms of the Data Protection Act, a company or business that determines the processing of confidential data is known as the Data Controller. The Data Controller is responsible for complying with the Data Protection Act.

Therefore, the Data Controller is legally responsible for the data right up until the point of destruction. Consequently, if using a professional information destruction company, it is important to get a certificate of destruction from the sub-contractor as proof that the process has been completed. Contravention of the Data Protection Act is a criminal offence carrying a maximum £5000 fine.

For more information on the Data Protection Act and its implications with regard to information destruction, download the BSIA's Guide to the Data Protection Act at www.bsia.co.uk. To find out more about the Data Protection Act in general, visit the Information Commissioner's website www.ico.gov.uk

How do I select a quality information destruction company?

By selecting a quality information destruction company, a business is ensuring that their confidential information is destroyed to the appropriate legal standards.

Firstly, check on the information destruction company's ability to provide a quality service consistently in line with your requirements. BSIA information destruction members are inspected to British Standard BS 8470:2006 and quality management standard ISO 9001:2000 by a UKAS accredited certification body. Adherence to standards should encompass staff vetting. Also, you should establish whether the company's procedures give you confidence in their employees' honesty and professionalism. BSIA information destruction members also comply with a Code of Ethics. Find out whether the information destruction company has a comprehensive understanding of the Data Protection Act and is capable of giving you advice on this topic.

The company should be registered as a waste carrier with the Environment Agency. This can be checked on the Environment Agency's website by [clicking here](#) or visit www.environment-agency.gov.uk. A reputable company will also provide you with a signed certificate of destruction for each completed batch and be aware of the need for a signed duty of care waste transfer note. Professional ID companies will also provide a receipt detailing the European Waste Codes.

What standards should information destruction companies be working to?

The British Standard for the information destruction sector is BS 8470:2006. The standard outlines the key requirements of a professional information destruction company and security is integral to this.

The British Standard covers the following areas: material specific shred sizes; requirements regarding the installation of a monitored intruder alarm and a monitored CCTV system; a prerequisite for the security vetting of all staff; and obligations with regard to the security of collection vehicles and on-site destruction vehicles.

The BSIA Information Destruction section has been at the forefront of the development of this standard as it is based upon a BSIA code of practice. For more information on the standard, download the BSIA's guide to BS 8470:2006 from the BSIA website www.bsia.co.uk/publications

- To find out more about information destruction or to source a BSIA information destruction company in your area, visit www.bsia.co.uk/shredding or call the helpline on **0845 389 3889**.