

Is your Personal Information Safe if you Recycle your Computer?

Clair Ryan, Kane County Recycling Coordinator, May 17, 2022

At County-funded shredding events, we help over a thousand households each year keep personal information safe by shredding and recycling documents bearing social security numbers, bank account numbers, medical records, and other similarly sensitive material. However, if you're like me, more and more that type of information - taxes forms, bank statements, credit card bills, etc., live less and less in a filing cabinet and more and more on a computer. Kane County's recycling program can help residents get rid of old computers, from desktops to laptops to tablets, but the question has been asked recently if we are as committed to keeping personal information safe through our electronics recycling as we are through document shredding. The answer is that YES, personal data on devices sent for recycling is carefully protected through our partnership with [eWorks](#).

E-Works processes all electronics from the County's electronics collection points. It holds a certificate called R2, which stands for Responsible Recycling. The [R2 standard](#) is an official accreditation that is maintained by [Sustainable Electronic Recycling International \(SERI\)](#), and you can see e-Works' certificates [here](#). R2 is not a static standard that was developed years ago and is just renewed over and over again until it is essentially obsolete - quite the opposite. SERI makes sure that R2 evolves with technology to keep data secure while still allowing reusable equipment to have a second life. [R2v3](#) was released in summer of 2020 and will be fully implemented by 2023.

In practice, this means that to keep their certification and to become recertified under program and its ever-increasing stringency, eWorks has to treat data-containing devices very carefully. All recycling centers are locked outside of open hours (at Fabyan, which lacks a perimeter fence, the trailer is kept locked). Data-containing devices are segregated from other electronics once they arrive at eWorks' main facility in Elk Grove. From there, data-containing devices are routed one of two ways: for physical destruction or for data deletion. The vast majority of consumer electronics, especially those more than a couple of years old, are in the first group, and the hard drives (HDD or SSD) or memory containing chips of these devices are physically destroyed by an industrial shredder. The shredded material and non-data-containing circuitry is sent to a smelter to recover and recycle the valuable metals. Some

newer devices are refurbished by e-Works. These devices are kept separately from all others in a limited-access area with 24 hour surveillance and metal detectors at the doors. Before refurbishment, trained staff run a seven pass data-erasure program that meets U.S. Department of Defense regulations for data destruction. From there, the devices are reconditioned for a second life.

Are you looking for ideas on how to use an old smart phone around your house instead of sending it for recycling? [This blog post](#) has some interesting tips!