

Take the time to protect sensitive information



A recent Operations Security (OPSEC) Working Group found sensitive information at Hanford that was carelessly mixed with other paper waste in recycle bins. The material should not have been there. Fortunately, the OPSEC Working Group discovered the documents before they left the site.

Reviews determined that the responsible individuals or departments that improperly discarded the sensitive information were aware they should not have done so. Some did not take the time, while cleaning out their desks or files, to review the documents for sensitivity before placing them in the recycle bins. Some thought the information was old and no longer pertinent. Some were not sure if the information was sensitive, but did not take the time to shred the information or have it reviewed.

The key to having a successful OPSEC program is awareness. Although much of the information we produce is not sensitive, some documents and information are sensitive and could be used by an adversary or competitor to our disadvantage.

The events of Sept. 11 and subsequent concerns have increased our need to safeguard sensitive information. Before placing a document in the recycle bin, ask yourself, "Would this information be useful to an adversary, terrorist or competitor, or would it be embarrassing to the company or an employee?"

If you are not sure of the sensitivity of the information or the document, treat it as sensitive. Take the time to properly dispose of sensitive material by shredding it. Managers should consider purchasing additional strip shredders and strategically placing them for maximum use — near copy machines, recycle bins or in offices.

In addition, managers should provide awareness training to their personnel on the handling and disposing of sensitive information. Managers should also consider removing recycle bins from areas where sensitive information is repeatedly disposed of improperly.

Should an OPSEC concern arise, talk to your manager. The problem can usually be fixed there. If you need additional assistance, contact Byron Beck at 376-3660 or an OPSEC Working Group member. ♦