

Establishing a Clean Desk Policy



About Shred-it Document Destruction

With over 30 years of experience securing sensitive information, Shred-it, a Stericycle solution, helps businesses of all sizes mitigate the ongoing threats and risks of workplace privacy breaches. Secure document destruction helps businesses ensure that their confidential client, employee, and business information is kept safe.

Why put a clean desk policy in place?

Help protect your company, your clients, and your reputation.

Most business projects require confidentiality, and everyone in the office handles documents that contain important and often confidential information. That means everyone in your office must protect documents and data from unauthorised access, internally and from outsiders. Maintaining a clean desk policy helps reduce the risk of unauthorised access.

Encourage better organisation and productivity for your employees, and provide peace of mind for your customers.

When everyone's desk is clean and all areas of the company are free from paper and clutter, your office space looks attractive, professional, and efficient. Employees feel more in control in a well-organised environment, and your customers are sure to have a good impression of your company.

It is important not to mistakenly dispose of sensitive documents in an unsecure bin. To help ensure the protection of sensitive information, place all unneeded documents in a locked Shred-it container.

Steps to create your clean desk policy.

In order to promote a clean desk policy, we recommend you teach the three "P"s of office organisation and follow these yourself to set the best example:

▶ **Plan first thing in the morning.**

Keep just the things you need for your workday on your desk. Start each day with a few minutes of planning so that you can organise the documents you need for immediate work. File all other folders and documents away in a locked cabinet or drawer.

▶ **Protect information whenever you leave your desk.**

You obviously have to leave your desk to attend meetings or to take breaks. But whenever you do, check to see if there is sensitive information on your desk, and place it inside a folder or off your desktop. And for additional security, make sure to switch on your computer's password-protected screen saver.

▶ **Pick up at the end of the day.**

When you leave your desk in the evening, don't leave documents on it. In order to maintain the security of both your client and employee information, it's essential to file your documents or lock them up, if necessary. If you get into the habit of cleaning off your desktop every day before you leave, you'll enjoy the added productivity benefits that come with a clean office first thing in the morning.

How to implement a clean desk policy:

▶ Put it in writing.

You'll want to communicate to all employees how to follow the policy, and why it's important. In addition, you'll want to specify what the consequences will be if anyone fails to comply with the policy – especially if your organisation works with highly sensitive information.

▶ Start at the top.

Your policy has to be taken seriously, especially by your senior management. If managers don't follow the policy, why should the rest of your employees? So make sure to get agreement from your senior managers to both follow and advocate the policy to everyone.

▶ Add a reminder to your email signatures.

If your organisation uses a standardised email signature, it makes sense to also include this reminder at the end of each signature: Please consider the environment before printing this email. Not only will this help reduce paper use, waste, and clutter, it will also help to safeguard important information from getting into the wrong hands.

▶ Provide lockable storage.

You simply can't have a clean desk policy in the workplace if your employees have nowhere to temporarily store their sensitive documents. Consider purchasing small, lockable storage boxes for employees that can fit under their desks.

▶ Encourage electronic vs. paper documents.

We all know there's lots of unnecessary printing in every office. If your employees work with more electronic documents, everyone will maintain a cleaner desk and there will be less paper clutter.

▶ Make backups routine.

If you discourage employees from using paper documents, make sure your organisation has a dependable backup system and routine in place. You'll want to be sure everyone's documents are safe in case power goes down or employee hard-drives crash.

How to enforce your clean desk policy:

▶ Display reminders in appropriate areas.

You can post signage in key areas of the office or create and use desk tents to remind each employee to follow the policy. It's especially important for employees to clean off their desktops at the end of the day.

▶ Appoint one or more employees to monitor office areas.

Your clean desk policy is useless if you don't enforce it throughout your workplace. Depending on the size of your workplace, you'll want a manager from each department or your operations or office manager to check everyone's desk at the end of the day. They should do a quick audit to make sure your employees are following your new policy – no papers, notes, or any other documents containing sensitive information should be left on desks. Once everyone gets into the routine, you may be able to do random versus daily checks based on your type of business and what types of information you handle.

▶ Stay vigilant and keep track.

For those employees who don't follow the policy, create and use a desk tent or a door hanger with a reminder not to leave sensitive documents on their desk. If any employee is noncompliant more than three times, there should be documented consequences, which are up to you to determine.

▶ Reward clean desk employees.

You can do this monthly by naming each employee with a 100% clean-desk record during group meetings. Or consider thanking your employees for maintaining the policy with an office lunch for everyone. You could even create a contest, based on department teams, to see which department is best at adhering to the policy and feature an award for the winning team. This is a great idea for when you first get started with your new clean desk policy.

**For more information, contact us at
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