

The dangers of in-house shredding

Shredding and fire safety

Businesses and consumers have increasingly become aware of the need to securely destroy documents that contain confidential information. But the implementation of in-house shredding programs can bring new risks: not only the danger of fire, but even explosions from accumulated dust and shredded paper. Retaining the services of a professional shredding service can not only save you time and money – it can also make your workplace appreciably safer.

The need for shredding

The secure destruction of sensitive documents is no longer merely optional. While in the past many organizations relied on recycling programs for their paper-waste flow, there are many regulations today that impact the handling and destruction of paper documents containing sensitive and personal information.

While recent years have seen a decrease in the use of in-house shredding programs owing to the financial and security benefits of employing a certified third-party shred vendor, some organizations continue to manage their shredding internally.

In-house shredding programs, however – particularly those utilizing large, commercial shredding equipment – face a number of significant security risks and safety hazards.

These risks include, but are not limited to:

- Physical injury to shredding equipment operators
- OSHA violations by employees responsible for material collection
- Health risks associated with excessive dust particles in the environment
- Compliance risks incurred by those charged with handling sensitive employee information

The dangers of shredding

An extremely serious but often overlooked or underappreciated risk derives from the possibility of a dust explosion, which is known technically as “deflagration.” The National Fire Protection Association’s Standard 654 – the Standard for the Prevention of Fire and Dust Explosions – explains that a deflagration is an expanding ball of flame that rapidly consumes existing dust in a confined space.

Industry fact

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A deflagration liberates large quantities of heat very rapidly, thereby increasing air temperature and pressure within the confined space. The resulting increase in pressure produces a rapidly radiating acoustic wave that causes fugitive dust to loosen and feed the flame spread. The wave can cause serious injury to personnel, as well as significant structural damage.

A deflagration is rare, but when it does occur the results can be catastrophic. And in-house shredding equipment can spark the explosion that ignites the dust created by shredding.

Even small shredders pose a danger

The risks associated with shredding are not confined to large, industrial-size shredders. Even small office shredders produce dust, and all shredded paper is highly flammable. While a small office shredder may not produce an actual dust explosion, small office shredders are known to have caused fires.

Iron Mountain's own risk Reduction program

Iron Mountain, long an industry leader in document destruction, maintains one of the largest shredding operations in North America and is acutely alert to the risks of dust deflagration. The steps Iron Mountain has taken to minimize the threat of deflagration within its own shredding facilities include:

- Engaging Fire Protection Engineers and other experts to help develop a dust deflagration prevention plan
- Investing in best-in-class dust collection systems and procedures
- Investing in ceiling-based fan systems to eliminate fugitive dust
- Investing in improved fire-suppression systems inside shred-plant equipment
- Protecting lights and electrical boxes in the plant with dustproof housing
- Implementing a daily dust-cleaning routine

- Increasing safety awareness and training throughout the Iron Mountain plant network

Outsourcing for safety and convenience

Whatever business you are in, it's probably not shredding. So why would you want to take on this crucial task yourself? Doing your own shredding will not only distract you from your actual business – it can pose a serious danger if it's not done right. **If you currently employ or are considering implementing an in-house shredding program, we urge you to carefully weigh the risks.**

Iron Mountain can provide your business with an attractive secure shredding offer that includes auditable chain of custody. It's one more reason why outsourcing your shredding to Iron Mountain is both a safer option and a better business decision. Let us do what we do best so you can do what you do best. Start to focus your resources where it matters most – on your core business.

800.899.IRON | [ironmountain.com](https://www.ironmountain.com)

About Iron Mountain

Iron Mountain Incorporated (NYSE: IRM), founded in 1951, is the global leader for storage and information management services. Trusted by more than 220,000 organizations around the world, and with a real estate network of more than 85 million square feet across more than 1,400 facilities in over 50 countries, Iron Mountain stores and protects billions of information assets, including critical business information, highly sensitive data, and cultural and historical artifacts. Providing solutions that include secure storage, information management, digital transformation, secure destruction, as well as data centers, art storage and logistics, and cloud services, Iron Mountain helps organizations to lower cost and risk, comply with regulations, recover from disaster, and enable a more digital way of working. Visit www.ironmountain.com for more information.

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