

17 Insider Threat Simulation Log Day 7: HIPAA Docs in Regular Trash

Date of Entry: 6/22/2025

Observer: Michael Warner

Location: Various Departments

Classification: Internal Security Simulation

Incident Overview

On the seventh day of my insider threat simulation, I observed a persistent violation of data disposal protocols: PHI (Protected Health Information) being discarded in standard trash bins rather than secured shredding containers. This was not a one-time oversight — it is a recurring behavior across multiple departments, with the exception of HR, executive offices, and system administration, who appear to follow proper disposal procedures.

Documents containing sensitive patient or client information were spotted inside unlocked trash cans, often mixed with general waste. These bins are unmonitored and accessible to janitorial staff, passersby, or even malicious insiders

Risk Assessment

Improper disposal of PHI creates several serious risks:

- Direct violation of HIPAA and data protection laws
- Exposure of sensitive data to unauthorized individuals
- Legal and financial repercussions in the event of a breach
- Opportunity for identity theft, fraud, or targeted social engineering

This is a compliance failure as much as a security lapse and indicates a lack of training or enforcement in daily practices.

Speculative Insider Perspective

From an insider or malicious actor's viewpoint, this vulnerability is easy to exploit:

- Retrieve confidential documents from trash bins with no resistance
- Use exposed information to launch phishing or identity-based attacks
- Leak physical documents without needing digital access
- Avoid detection entirely due to the passive nature of waste disposal

The fact that this occurs routinely and in plain sight makes it both easy and low-risk to abuse.

Initial Thoughts & Actions

I did not remove or examine any specific documents. My observations were made during normal operations and without interacting with the environment. Documentation was performed discretely and ethically.

Recommendations (Low-Impact Suggestions)

- Reintroduce secure shredding bins in all departments, not just executive offices
- Conduct refresher training on proper disposal of PHI
- Post signage near waste stations reminding staff of disposal policy
- Periodically audit trash bins for improper document disposal
- Consider locked shredding consoles in high-risk or high-traffic areas

Severity Rating

High — repeated HIPAA violations through improper disposal practices introduce major legal, financial, and reputational risk.

- End of Entry -