



HEARING OVER THE DIN

Jon Packman sorts out fact from fiction with regards shredder safety levels.

The security of confidential information has become a major concern for both companies and individuals in recent years.

With personal and corporate identity theft on the rise, it's vital that sensitive documents are prevented from falling into the wrong hands. Shredders are the weapon of choice here, and today are just as likely to be found in the home as a government embassy.

There are two main types of machine: strip cut and cross cut. The former cuts material into spaghetti-like pieces, while cross cut produces confetti. Demand has moved towards cross cut because the tinier you can shred, the harder it is for someone to put a document back together. They also have an added advantage in that the shreds compact under their own weight, so the waste container needs emptying far less often.

However, because less cutting is required, strip cut machines can shred more sheets of paper in one go than their cross cut equivalents.

Essentially, the choice between the two comes down to how much risk you want to take. The level of security a shredder provides is referred to as its DIN level, and the higher the DIN, the higher the security. "DIN 1 gives you everyday security, whereas DIN 5 provides high security," explains Tyron Hill, European marketing director of manufacturer Fellowes.

"For most users, DIN 3 would be advisable for shredding personal and financial details before throwing them out. In business, a DIN 4 model is definitely advisable for destroying financial and personnel records, while the DIN 5 models are generally used by government and military organisations." >>



Top security shredders even go up to DIN 6, at which level an A4 sheet of paper is sliced and diced into a near impossible 15,000-piece jigsaw.

Security isn't the only reason to buy a shredder, though. Using one effectively means there's less of a need to store files and records, and you can also save money by reducing the bulk of paper to be disposed of and removed from the office. Furthermore, shredded paper can be sold on to recycling companies and you can even use it for packing material for shipping and mailing.

Before you make a purchase, consider what security level you need, what you intend to shred, and how much. The shredder you select depends on whether you will be shredding paper, CDs, photos or even whole files.

"It's important that the user makes the correct choice for their needs," says Hill. "A product range can be segmented into home, home-office, small business and office shredders, so the first thing is to look at where the shredder will be used.

"In the home, for example, usage may be occasional or light, but size, style and safety features will be key priorities. If a shredder is needed for departmental use, then run time, noise levels and reliability will be more important."

As with any piece of equipment designed to cut and destroy, safety is of paramount importance. Consider features such as child locks if you're using a shredder at home, and any sensors that automatically shut down the machine if hands get too close. The loss of a body part is, however, an unlikely event according to Barry Robbins, national sales manager at manufacturer HSM.

"The aperture where paper or electronic media enters the shredder is generally restricted to the size of those materials," he says. "Therefore, the opening is much smaller than a finger. Should something enter the shredding slot, such as a

person's hair or clothing, many machines are designed to recognise that there is some resistance and automatically go into reverse. For shredders that do not have this feature, a switch is often available to immediately reverse the action of the shredder and eject the offending material.

"With a strip cut machine, both the top and bottom apertures should be slim in width. However, with a cross cut machine, because of the need to dispose of the particles generated, the shredding mechanism will be exposed. The risk created by this factor is eliminated on some machines by safety cut-out switches that operate as soon as the head of the shredder is removed or the door is opened."

In terms of ease of use, features like a pull-out bin will help when you need to empty the shredder, plus an angled cutting system is a bonus if you're shredding under a desk. Choosing one that accepts staples, paper clips or fasteners means you don't have to waste time removing them beforehand. And to reduce costs and save the environment, many shredders are now energy efficient, offering sleep modes and automatic shut-down after a period of inactivity.

Like all machines, adds Robbins, shredders need a degree of TLC. "If they are not regularly cleaned, oiled and maintained, the life of the cutting heads and the machine itself can be significantly shortened," he says.

While all shredders work well to begin with, the true test comes when heavy loads and stacks of documents are shredded regularly. If it's not built to withstand this stress, you're likely to incur costly repairs and service fees. With the range of shredders growing all the time, you can pretty much find one that's suitable for every situation at home or in the office. But this increasing sophistication makes it even more important that you make an informed decision about what to purchase. ■

Trend Watch

WHICH DIN LEVEL SHREDDERS HAVE BEEN THE MOST POPULAR BUYS RECENTLY, AND WHICH HAVE SHOWN THE MOST SALES GROWTH THROUGH 2007?

DIN security level 3 shredders have shown the biggest growth, and have been the best selling machines for our company over the last 12 months. This trend has continued into 2007. The reasons are twofold. Firstly, improved technology in shredding shafts has made cross-cut machines more efficient than they used to be in terms of capacity, and the cost gap between strip-cut and cross-cut has reduced. Secondly, DIN security level 3 at one time was met by 2mm strip-cut machines, which had the disadvantage of increasing the bulk of the shredded documents and filling the bag too quickly. The 4x40mm cross-cut format meets DIN security level 3, the capacity of the machine is better, and the shreds pack down so that a much greater volume is contained in each shred bag.

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