Chapter 46
Heartland Regional Health Authority—Disposal of IT and Communication Equipment Follow Up

1.0 MAIN POINTS

We conducted a follow-up of our 2009 Report – Volume 3 where we assessed Heartland Regional Health Authority's (Heartland's) processes to secure electronic information during the disposal of information technology and communication equipment.

Heartland has made progress in addressing our three recommendations of equipment. It has implemented one recommendation and has more work to do on the remaining two.

Heartland has a policy for its disposal of information technology and communications equipment. However, Heartland has not yet documented specific methods for disposing of different types of equipment or verified that the methods are effective in removing sensitive data.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The Regional Health Services Act makes health authorities responsible for the planning, organization, delivery, and evaluation of health services in their health regions. To carry out its role, Heartland must manage health care information. Heartland has a duty to secure electronic information that may contain sensitive and personal information. Ensuring security of health care information upon disposal of equipment is of particular importance to patients and regional health authorities. Unauthorized persons could access information if it is not properly erased from information technology or communications equipment prior to disposal.

In 2009, we assessed Heartland's controls to secure electronic information during the disposal of information technology and communications equipment.

Our 2009 Report – Volume 3, Chapter 10D concluded that Heartland had adequate controls except that it needed to document its procedures, follow its approved policy and verify that procedures for disposal are effective. We made three recommendations.

3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out our recommendations and Heartland's actions up to August 31, 2012. We found that Heartland has implemented one recommendation and has more work to do on the other two recommendations.

3.1   Document Disposal Procedures

We recommended that Heartland Regional Health Authority document its procedures to remove confidential information during disposal of information technology and communications equipment. (2009 Report – Volume 3; Public Accounts Committee agreement June 18, 2010)

Status – We continue to make this recommendation.

Heartland has made progress towards implementing this recommendation but still has work to do. Heartland has a formal policy and procedures for equipment disposal, however these do not specifically set out the acceptable and approved disposal methods for different types of equipment.

Heartland needs to document specific methods for disposing of different types of equipment and keep this documentation up-to-date. New equipment may require new methods. Failure to document specific methods could result in dated, less effective procedures and inconsistency in disposing of IT equipment. Without such documentation, turnover of key staff could result in lost knowledge regarding methods of disposal and processes for verification that data is unrecoverable.

3.2   Compliance with Policy and Procedures Documented

We recommended that Heartland Regional Health Authority document that it follows its approved policy and procedures when disposing of information technology and communications equipment. (2009 Report – Volume 3; Public Accounts Committee agreement June 18, 2010)

Status – Implemented.

Heartland has documented how it handled its disposal of information technology and communications equipment. The documentation identifies who disposed of the equipment, when the disposal occurred, and the disposal method. However, as noted above, Heartland should improve its policy and procedures to specify acceptable methods of disposal.

3.3 Verify Procedures Are Effective

We recommended that Heartland Regional Health Authority regularly verify that its procedures to remove sensitive information from information technology and communications equipment are effective. (2009 Report – Volume 3; Public Accounts Committee agreement June 18, 2010)

Status – We continue to make this recommendation.

Heartland has not fully tested its procedures to ensure they are effective. As technology changes, procedures for disposal of IT equipment can become less effective. Therefore, it is important to regularly verify that procedures are effective in removing sensitive data.