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Identification of data wiping tools based on deletion patterns in ReFS \$Logfile

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ABSTRACT

Data wiping tools permanently delete files by repeatedly overwriting data on a digital device, making file recovery impossible. Unlike the conventional deletion methods, which merely remove the file system pointer to the data, these tools are designed to entirely and irretrievably erase the data. This method can be exploited to obliterate evidence of a crime. Given the growing prevalence of such tools, a comprehensive analysis of permanent deletion behavior is essential, especially concerning the Resilient File System (ReFS). In this study, we propose a method for detecting user behavior concerning data wiping tools and algorithms in ReFS 3.7. Our approach relies on the fact that file modifications are logged in the redo record of the \$Logfile, and that the opcode value of the redo record varies depending on the data wiping tool used. Since opcodes were only analyzed up to version 3.4, we analyzed the newly updated opcodes. Initially, we selected the 12 most commonly used data wiping tools for our research. In the pattern analysis phase, we applied the algorithms supported by each tool, generating a distinct deletion pattern for each one. This was accomplished by utilizing consecutive opcodes to formulate the patterns and monitor transitions in file and directory names. The patterns discerned in the \$Logfile allowed us to determine which data wiping tool was deployed. The proposed methodology simplifies the identification of not only which data wiping tool has been used, but also the specific deletion behavior exhibited. We developed a tool incorporating the proposed method. Our subsequent verification confirmed the effectiveness of our methodology and tools in accurately detecting the use of comprehensive deletion tools. These findings contribute valuable insights to the acquisition of digital evidence of user deletion behavior in ReFS. Our proposed methodology will help digital forensic examiners in the detection and identification of data wiping tools' behavior.

1. Introduction

ReFS is a Windows filesystem developed by Microsoft since the launch of NTFS the intention of maximizing data availability, ensuring data integrity, and providing resilience against corruption. Compared to NTFS supporting 256 TB, ReFS vastly expands available space with support for an endorsed size of 35 PB (Microsoft, 2023). Despite ReFS being less commonly used than other file systems its usage doesn't exempt it from potential criminal activities (Brinkmann, 2023). As a non-bootable system, ReFS has fewer artifacts compared to others. Additionally, digital forensic tools such as Encase, Axiom, FTK, and Autopsy have limitations when dealing with ReFS. They only analyze up to specific versions or do not normally work, so that makes it difficult to

find the user behavior, unlike other file systems. Therefore, it's essential to develop forensic analysis research to acquire evidence related to criminal activities. In this study, we focus on the traces left by the usage of data wiping tools in illicit activities. Internationally, there have been numerous criminal cases related to data wiping tools, such as the Virginia case (Woolwine, 2022) and the Swansea case (Jason Evans, 2022). Politically controversial cases have also emerged, like the one involving illegal surveillance of civilians by the South Korean Prime Minister's Office in June 2008. The court accepted the evidence of data wiping tool usage from an external computer as proof of document concealment (Lee, 2020). However, it could only be considered evidence when it was proven that the wiping tool used was identical to the program installed on the PC.

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This paper proposes a methodology for identifying evidence of specific wiping tool behavior through an opcode pattern analysis of the \$Logfile. To provide insights into complete deletion tools, we analyzed the functionalities and algorithms of the top 12 widely used tools, including Easy File Shredder and Kernel File Shredder. A meticulous examination was conducted to scrutinize the distinct patterns and relevant information that manifests in \$Logfile throughout the course of data wiping using a range of deletion tools. These data wiping tools utilize their own algorithms for overwrite files multiple times. The deletion is executed by applying algorithms supported by each wiping tool, including the Gutmann algorithm (Gutmann, 1996a), a deletion method that overwrites data 35 times. We conducted experiments to investigate whether there are variations in patterns based on the deletion algorithm. We raised the question of whether pattern alterations depend on the use of a specific algorithm, as well as on the tools themselves. Furthermore, we analyzed filename changes to determine whether the deletion behavior can be traced back to specific characteristics.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews previous studies on ReFS and deletion tools. Section 3 presents the environmental settings in which the methodology was applied and the corresponding results. Section 4 details the implementation of the method and the validation of the results obtained from Section 3. Section 5 concludes with remarks on our findings.

2. Related research

2.1. Concept of ReFS

The key attributes of ReFS encompass integrity streams, storage space integration, data recovery, proactive error correction, real-time tier optimization, and VM acceleration optimization. Research had suggested that the data availability and resilience offered by ReFS could see it become a more commonly used file system in the future (Lee et al., 2021). It supports block cloning, sparse VDL, file-level snapshots, and real-time tier optimization, which are features not present in NTFS. Moreover, structurally, it uses B+ trees, a uniform disk structure that represents all disk-based information (Gudadhe et al., 2015).

ReFS is a journaling file system that maintains journal files like the Change Journal and \$Logfile to document actions and modifications (Savoldi et al., 2012). While the Change Journal records the change history, including file and directory names, it doesn't allow for the extraction of sequenced behavior patterns with files. Therefore, in this study, we focused on the \$Logfile, aiming to identify transactions based on opcode. \$Logfile can be used as a forensic artifact by analyzing metadata related to work activities and target files, hence it was chosen for our research.

2.2. Wiping tools and erasure algorithms

Research on wiping activities was conducted on various Windows artifacts analysis of file systems. Savoldi et al. (2012) discussed scenarios related to data deletion cases and introduced a methodology to detect artifacts on a disk. They also used statistical methods to identify deleted regions on disks filled with random but periodic rule data. A different approach to our study on \$Logfile in ReFS was proposed by Kim and Lee (2015), which aimed to identify the data wiping tool by extracting the trace time with the Amcache.hve. Shin et al. (2016) analyzed the file structure and log storage for a damaged EVTXT (Windows XML Event Log) and proposed a recovery method for Chunk and Record units. Their comparison and analysis of both recovery methods suggested that the Chunk unit recovery method is more efficient if there hasn't been intentional damage, otherwise, the Record method is more effective. Smith et al. (2017) documented forensic artifacts that can collect and recover digital evidence from VMDK files. Their research centered around identifying forensic artifacts and their locations in virtualized

computing to provide foundational knowledge for future digital forensic investigations. Cho (2018) addressed the problem of existing data hiding methods by bit correction in Timestamp of \$MFT. There have been numerous studies analyzing journal files such as \$Logfile, where transaction operations are recorded, and \$UsnJrnl, which records changes in files and directories. Kim et al. (2020) analyzed user behavior in \$UsnJrnl files and proposed a method to recover deleted \$UsnJrnl files. They recovered \$J property records of deleted journal files in non-allocation areas through file carving and found that they could recover a minimum of 75 to a maximum of 39,912 compared to \$UsnJrnl:\$J files obtained in live areas. Oh et al. (2021) discussed NTFS Log Tracker v1.7, which is used to manipulate the installation, execution, and use of suspicious tools based on signatures and patterns. Prior studies have also conducted experiments using specific data wiping tools. Jones and Afrifa (2020) performed an experiment on the efficacy of 8 data wiping tools and discovered that data remained when using Super File Shredder and Disk wipe. Horsman (2021) analyzed changes and logs of file properties with 8 data wiping tools in NTFS and FAT, demonstrating the characteristics that appeared when using data wiping tools. Unlike NTFS, which records both Redo and Undo opcodes, ReFS exclusively records Redo opcodes and has a unique filesystem structure. AlHarbi et al. (2022) confirmed that all files were successfully deleted and non-recoverable with 4 data wiping tools. They analyzed the file name that remained in the metadata after file deletion, presented the characteristics of each tool, and showed that the data wiping tool did not alter the internal information of the journal file. However, none of these studies targeted ReFS, and Horsman only viewed fragmentary records remaining in the log using existing log tools. Data wiping tools are generally count-based algorithms developed for confidentiality, such as U.S. DoD 5220, and so forth. These data wiping tools include the erasure algorithms listed in Table 1. The algorithms differ in the number of passes and speed. They also vary in the data and methods for overwriting. E.g., the Gutmann algorithm overwrites the target location 35 times with specific hexadecimal data, such as 00, ff, complement, or random values, while the other algorithms generally overwrite with decimal data between one to seven times.

2.3. ReFS forensics

Research on ReFS forensics has been conducted with a limited scope, primarily focusing on structural analysis and internal operational principles. Prade et al. (2019) applied digital forensic methods to version 3.4 of ReFS, analyzing changes in data when utilizing carving technology.

Table 1

Global erasure algorithm standard.

No	Algorithm	Pass	Speed
1	HMG IS5 Base Line(British) (Jones and Afrifa, 2020)	1	Fast
2	GOST R 50739-95(Russian) (Russia, 1995)	2	Fast
3	Air Force(AFSSI) 5020(US) (U.S. Air Force, 1998)	3	Fast
4	Army AR380-19(US) (U.S. Army, 1998)	3	Middle
5	DoD 5220.22 M (US) (U.S. Defense Security Services, 2007)	3	Slow
6	DoD 5220.22 M E(US) (U.S. Defense Security Services, 2007)	3	Fast
7	DoE M-205.1-2 (US) (U.S. Dept. of energy, 2005)	3	-
8	HMG IS5 Enhanced (Jones and Afrifa, 2020)	3	Fast
9	ITSG2006 (Easy file shredder)	3	Fast
10	NAVSO P-5239-26(MFM) (US Navy) (U.S. Dept)	3	Fast
11	NAVSO P-5239-26(RLL) (US Navy) (U.S. Dept)	3	Fast
12	DoD 5220.28 STD (WASHINGTON, 1978)	7	Slow
13	DoD 5220.22 M E C E (WASHINGTON, 1978)	7	Middle
14	Bruce Schneier (Schneier, 1995)	7	Middle
15	VSITR (Bundesamts fr Sicherheit in der, 2004)	7	Slow
16	RCMP TSSIT OPS-II (RCMP G2-003, 2003)	7	Middle
17	N.A.T.O (Bitraser)	7	-
18	Peter Gutmann (Gutmann, 1996a)	35	Very Slow



Fig. 1. Analysis methodology.

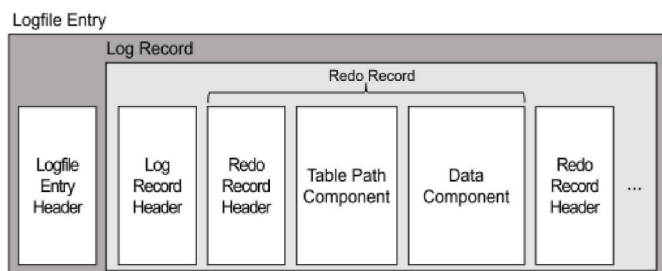


Fig. 2. Logfile entry structure.

However, this approach needs to be improved in its ability to discern user behavior as it concentrates solely on recovery. Kim (2019) proposed a method to recover deleted data by analyzing ReFS's internal metadata. The author compared the characteristics of existing large file systems, analyzed data storage principles, and presented two recovery algorithms. Nordvik et al. (2019) demonstrated that tracking deleted files was possible by analyzing the File Name Attribute (FNA) and data attributes using reverse engineering, yet made no attempt to analyze user behavior. Lee et al. (2019, 2021) began an opcode analysis of the \$Logfile on ReFS version 3.4 to discern patterns of user behavior. Their studies on ReFS have primarily analyzed user behavior, but not focused on wiping. These studies only considered file creation, renaming, content modification, and normal deletion.

3. Experiment and result

3.1. Methodology

3.1.1. Experiment methodology

To analyze the \$Logfile generated after using data wiping tools, we used VMware Workstation 16.2.2 and Windows Server 2022 Standard Evaluation (x64-based, 21H2, OS build 20348.587) machine running on Intel Core i7-6700K processor with 32 GB DIMM 2133 MHz RAM. We created a partition on Windows and formatted the drive as ReFS(version 3.7) with size of 20,000 MB. We also considered SSDs due to their different characteristics from hard disks (Maneas et al., 2021). To verify if methods applied to HDDs can be applied to SSD (Samsung T7 1 TB), we used the same virtual machine environment. We formatted the external disk as ReFS and performed the same experiment by connecting a Portable SSD formatted with ReFS. We could obtain the same pattern results when inspecting the log file on the SSD as we did with the HDD.

After creating files with the source script (Matuzalem, 2022), and directories using the File Explorer 'New context menu', we wiped them using both the built-in delete function and data wiping tools. Also, it was executed on the files using the algorithms supported by each tool. We selected tools that operated the delete function properly in Windows ReFS and were publicly available data wiping tools. These tools are freely available for download on the internet, offer various deletion functions, and are easily accessible to users.

The analysis outlines the process of generating opcode patterns to discern user behavior with a data wiping tool. Fig. 1 shows a flow of the analysis methodology suggested in this study. In the first step, we analyzed 12 wiping tools to manage user behavior regarding the deletion function. After formatting the disk with ReFS, we created several files and directories then deleted the files using the tools with their

Table 2
Opcodes and operations.

Opcode	Redo operation	Version
0x01	Redo Insert Row	3.4 (Lee et al., 2021), 3.7
0x02	Redo Delete Row	
0x04	Redo Update Data with Root	
0x05	Redo Repair Table	
0x06	Redo Allocate	
0x07	Redo Free	
0x08, 0x09	Redo Set Range State	
0x10	Redo Value as Key	
0x12	Copy Key Helper	
0x0F	Redo Delete Table	
0x1D	Redo Unlink Parent ID	3.7
0x1E	Redo Value as Longlong	
0x1F	Redo Update Stream Summary	
0x20	Redo Value as Key	

algorithms. In the second step, we extract the opcodes from the \$Logfile. In the third step, the opcode patterns derived from the same task were integrated. These derived patterns were categorized into 12 tools. Lastly, we applied the structure analysis method to the data wiping tools to derive File Creation patterns and automated this process for the development of a program that detects the execution of wiping tools.

3.1.2. Logfile analysis methodology

The data area of the Logfile contains the \$Logfile entry, which is composed of a Header and Log record, as shown in Fig. 2. Each Log record consists of multiple different redo records, including a Header, Data Offset Array, and Transaction Data, with an offset size of 1000. The Redo record commences at position 0xB0. The Transaction Data is comprised of a Table path and Data (Prade et al., 2019), allowing us to discern metadata such as the filename and date. Redo records are utilized to reconstruct changes in the event of a file system error in the Data Component (Russinovich, 2012). When a change occurs in the file system, information about the change and its location is stored to be used for recovery (Lee et al., 2021). Changes that have not yet been committed can be reconstructed. Opcodes are recorded in the redo record, reflecting internal changes prompted by user behaviors in the file. A previous study (Lee et al., 2021) identified 28 opcodes for ReFS redo operations in version 3.4. Opcodes were only discovered up to '1C' because that's all that existed in version 3.4. However, we identified the newly emerged '1D', '1E', and '1F' in version 3.7. by analyzing the refs.sys file using the IDA free 8.3.230608. Table 2 shows some opcodes

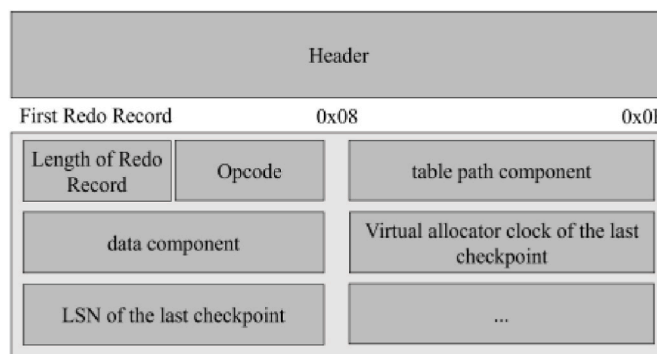


Fig. 3. Detail of redo record (Prade, 2019).

Table 3
Wiping tool list and algorithms (O: Available, -: Not Available, Δ: Available only full version).













												
Tool Name	Easy File Shredder	File Shredder	Hard Wipe	Kernel File Shredder	PC Shredder	Remo File Eraser	Secure Eraser	Super File Shredder	Turbo Shredder	Wipe File	xShredder	XT File Shredder
Version	2.0.2022 (U.S. Defense Security Services, 2007)	2.5 (FileShredder)	5.2.1 (Hardwipe)	11.04.0 (Kernel file shredder)	1.1 (PCShredder, 2008)	2.0.0.5 (Remo Software)	1.0.0 (Secure Eraser)	4.12 (Kakasoft)	0.036 (Turbo Shredder)	3.6 (Wipe File)	7.7.4.9 (xShredder)	2.1 (XT File Shredder)
One(Simple)	-	O	-	-	-	-	-	O	O	O	-	O
Secure	-	O	-	-	-	-	-	O	O	O	-	-
Random	-	-	O	-	-	O	O	-	O	O	-	-
Zero	O	-	O	O	-	O	-	-	O	O	-	-
HMG IS5 BaseLine& Enhanced	-	-	-	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	O	-
GOST P50739-95	O	-	O	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	O	-
Air Force 5020	O	-	-	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	O	-
AR380-19	O	-	-	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	O	-
DoD 5220.M 3	O	O	O	O	O	O	-	O	-	-	O	O
DoD 5220.M E	O	-	-	-	-	-	O	-	-	-	-	O
ITSG2006	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
NAVSO P-5239-26(RLL)	-	-	-	-	-	Δ	-	-	-	-	-	-
DoD 5220.28 STD	O	-	-	-	-	Δ	-	-	-	-	-	-
DoD 5220.22 M E C E	O	-	-	-	O	-	O	-	-	-	O	-
Bruce Schneier	O	-	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	O	-
VISITR	O	-	O	O	-	-	O	-	-	-	O	-
RCMP TSSIT OPS II	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	O	-
Peter Gutmann	O	O	O	O	O	Δ	O	O	O	O	O	-

Table 4
Patterns of typical actions.

Operation	Pattern
File Creation	0x01→0x04→0x10→0x04→0x01→0x00→0x04→0x20→0x04→(0x04)
File Modification	0x06→0x1f→0x1f→0x04→0x04→0x08
File Renaming	0x02→0x05→0x01→0x04→0x04→0x04
Simple File Deletion	0x01→0x04→0x10→0x00→0x04→0x01→0x00→0x06→0x04→0x04→0x04→0x02→0x05→0x01→0x04→0x10→0x04→0x01→0x04→0x03→0x04→0x04→0x01→0x04→0x04→0x04→0x04→0x04→0x04→0x08
Permanent File Deletion	0x0f→0x02→0x02→0x0f→0x02→0x04
Directory Creation	0x04→0x10→0x01→0x01→0x01→0x0e→0x03→0x04
Directory Renaming	0x02→0x02→0x01→0x01→0x04→0x04
Simple Directory Deletion	P(Directory Creation)→0x06→0x04→0x04→0x04→0x04→0x03→0x02→0x02→0x01→0x01→0x0e→0x04→0x03→0x04→0x04→0x04→0x01→0x04→0x03→0x04→0x04→0x08
Permanent Directory Deletion	0x02→0x0f→0x02→0x0f→0x04→0x12
Permanent Directory Deletion Containing Files	0x0f→0x02→0x02→0x0f→0x02→0x02→0x0f→0x02→0x0f→0x04→0x12

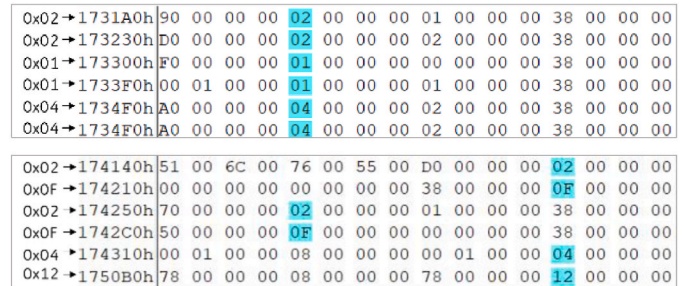
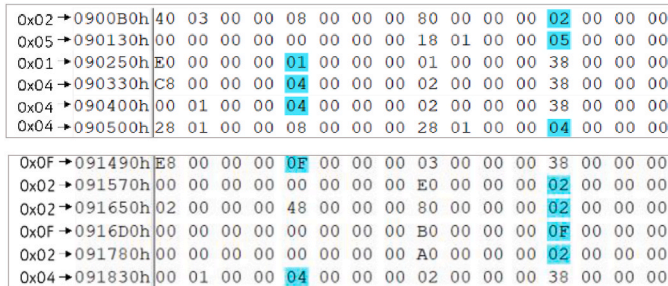


Fig. 4. Opcode pattern for File Renaming(Top, Left)/Deletion(Bottom, Left) and Directory Renaming(Top, Right)/Deletion(Bottom, Right).

found before and the new opcodes we identified in version 3.7. Redo record can be used to verify the contents of the task from the metadata in the transaction area under the header using the opcodes, such as filename and time information. An activity is observable in the same or consecutive time value-based last checkpoint. The last checkpoint (a pair of Virtual allocator clocks of the last checkpoint at 0x18 and LSN of the last checkpoint at 0x20) (AlHarbi et al., 2022) was identified in the redo record as shown in Fig. 3. We created a pattern by linking opcodes with the same value.

3.2. Fundamental analysis

3.2.1. Analysis of wiping tool

The tools under analysis provide a default delete function for files and directories, supporting the removal of superfluous files, i.e., recycle bin and drive cleanup. We found that the delete function incorporated one or more algorithms, and each tool included at least four different algorithms. In this study, we selected only the algorithms present in at least two of the chosen tools, as illustrated in Table 3.

3.2.2. Analysis of typical deletion pattern

The general deletions have been divided into simple deletion and permanent deletion (see Table 4). Permanent deletion is performed by selecting the file and using the ‘Shift + Delete’ key. When deleting a directory that contains a file, the file pattern emerges first, followed by the directory pattern.

3.3. Analysis of deletion pattern

3.3.1. Analysis of file deletion pattern

Upon analyzing the opcode of the \$Logfile after file deletion using the data wiping tools, we identified a common File Modification and File Deletion pattern using the Hex editor. Fig. 4 showcases the File Renaming pattern ‘0x02→0x05→0x01→0x04→0x04→0x04’ (hereinafter, P(FR)), and the File Deletion pattern ‘0x0f→0x02→0x02→0x0f→0x02→0x04’ (hereinafter, P(FD)). Opcode ‘0x04’ appears irregularly and is differentiated by being enclosed in

parentheses.

3.3.2. Analysis of Directory Deletion pattern

Directory Deletion was executed differently from file patterns. When using a wiping tool to permanently delete a directory, we extracted the common pattern of directory name changes and the pattern of completely deleting a directory using a Hex editor. Fig. 4 displays the Directory Renaming pattern ‘0x02→0x02→0x01→0x01→0x04→0x04’ (hereinafter, P(DR)), and the Directory Deletion pattern ‘0x02→0x0f→0x02→0x0f→0x04→0x12’ (hereinafter, P(DD)).

3.4. Wiping tool pattern result

3.4.1. Opcode pattern result

We assigned file and directory names to identify tools and algorithms in the \$Logfile. We then extracted all opcodes within the log range specified by user behavior, referring to the final location of the log appearing for each action. Detailed analysis results are tabulated in Table 5. We consolidated and presented the opcode results in patterned form. We employed the ‘*’ symbol for the recursive single opcode and grouped consecutive opcodes using ‘()’. If the pattern varies among algorithms, all types are explicitly listed. However, if the pattern remains constant, it is consolidated using the ‘All’ label. Analyzing the opcodes in the \$Logfile after deleting a file with a data wiping tool, we identified identical File Changing patterns and File Deletion patterns when the file was permanently deleted with the data wiping tool. We also noticed differences in analysis results for files and directories. In some cases, files were affected by algorithms while directories were not. The iteration count of specific opcodes for Easy File Shredder, Hardwipe, PCShredder, Super File Shredder, and Turbo Shredder was found to be fluctuate depending on the pattern’s algorithm. For instance, in Easy File Shredder, the File Renaming Pattern is repeated 36 times in the Gutmann algorithm (overwriting 35 times) and 8 times by overwriting it 7 times. Consequently, the specific number of iterations according to the pattern is the value of ‘pass +1’. Easy File Shredder maintains the same iteration count for both File and Directory in the same algorithm. In Super File Shredder, file patterns vary in iteration count depending on

Table 5
Data wiping pattern results.

Algorithm	File Deletion Pattern	Directory Deletion Pattern
Easy File Shredder		
Random, Zero	0x04*2→P(FR)*4→0x07→0x1f→P(FD)	P(DR)*2→P(DD)
GOST P50739	0x04*3→P(FR)*4→0x07→0x1f→P(FD)	
Air Force 5020, AR380-19, DoD M 3, ITSG 2006, DoD M E	0x04*4→P(FR)*4→0x07→0x1f→P(FD)	
DoD 5220.28 STD, DoD MECE, Bruce Schneier, VISITR	0x04*8→P(FR)*4→0x07→0x1f→P(FD)	P(DR)*8→P(DD)
Peter Gutmann	0x04*36→P(FR)*37→0x07→0x1f→P(FD)	P(DR)*36→P(DD)
File Shredder		
All	0x04*2→0x1f→0x04→0x07→0x1f→0x04→P(FR)→P(FD)	P(DR)→0x04→0x03*2→P(DD)
Hardwipe		
Random, Zero, GOST P50739, DoD M 3, Bruce Schneier, VSITR, Peter Gutmann	((0x1f)→0x04*(variable))→0x1f→0x04→0x07→0x1f→0x04→P(FR)*3→P(FD)	P(DR)*3→P(DD)
Kernel File Shredder		
All	0x06→0x1f*2→0x08*3→P(FR)→0x07→0x1f→P(FD)	P(DR)→P(DD)
PC Shredder		
DoD M 3	0x04*3→P(FR)→0x07→0x1f→P(FD)	P(DR)→0x04→P(DD)
DoD MECE	0x04*7→P(FR)→0x07→0x1f→P(FD)	
Peter Gutmann	0x04*35→P(FR)→0x07→0x1f→P(FD)	
Remo File Eraser		
All	0x04→0x1f→0x04*2→P(FR)→0x07→0x1f→P(FD)	P(DR)→P(DD)
Secure Eraser		
All	0x06→0x1f→0x08→0x1f→0x04→0x07→0x1f→0x04→P(FR)*9→P(FD)	P(DR)*9→P(DD)
Super File Shredder		
One, Secure, DoD M	0x04→0x06→(0x1f*2→0x08→0x04*2→0x06)*2→0x1f*2→0x08→0x04*2→0x1f→0x04→0x07→0x1f→0x04→P(FR)→P(FD)	P(DR)→P(DD)
Peter Gutmann	0x04→0x06→(0x1f*2→0x08→0x04*2→0x06)*14→0x1f*2→0x08→0x04*2→0x1f→0x04→0x07→0x1f→0x04→P(FR)→P(FD)	
TurboShredder		
Zero, One, Secure Random	0x04*(variable)→P(FR)*pass→0x04*(pass+1)→0x07→0x1f→P(FD)	Not Available
Peter Gutmann	0x04*(variable)→P(FR)→0x04*37→0x07→0x1f→P(FD)	
WipeFile		
All	0x04*2→0x07→0x1f→0x04→P(FR)→0x04*3→P(FD)	0x04→0x03*2→P(DR)→0x04→0x04→(0x03*2→0x04*2)*3→P(DD)
xShredder		
All	0x06→0x04*4→(0x04)→P(FR)→0x04(0x04)*6→0x07→0x04→P(FD)	Not Available
XT File Shredder		
All	0x04→0x1f→0x04→0x07→0x1f→0x04→P(FR)→P(FD)	P(DD)

Table 6
File/directory name transition according to renaming pattern.

Tool	Filename pattern + (extension pattern)	Directory
Easy File Shredder	A random array of alphabets, symbols and number	A random array of alphabets and number
File Shredder	Random number + (. repeat 'Z')	Random number
Hardwipe	Random lowercase alphabets	Random lowercase alphabets
Kernel File Shredder	Repeat one random uppercase letter	Repeat one random uppercase letter
PC Shredder	temp + Random 11 number	temp + Random 11 number
Remo File Eraser	Repeat 'x' + (. Repeat 'x')	Repeat 'x'
Secure Eraser	A random array of alphabets or number	A random array of alphabets or number
Super File Shredder	1070E08F + Random number	0. + four-digit random number
Turbo shredder	A random array of alphabets or number	-
Wipe File	Random alphabets and number + (. random letter)	Random alphabets and number
xShredder	Repeat one random lowercase letter	-
XT File Shredder	Random lowercase alphabets + (.random alphabets)	-

the algorithm, but in directory patterns, all patterns remain consistent regardless of the algorithm. Hardwipe has different patterns depending on the file size. When we create a file size of 10 KB in Hardwipe, the pattern is as follows: '0x04→(0x1f→0x04)*69 → 0x1f→0x04→0x07→

0x1f→0x04→P(FR) *3→P(FD)'. However, when the file size is set to 50 KB, the pattern becomes '[4(N * More than 20)→0x1f→0x04→0x07→0x1f→0x04→P(FR)*3→P(FD)]'. In this case, it is confirmed that N is variable depending on the file size.

Table 7
Summary of pattern result.

Tool	Node, Edge	Diagram
Easy File Shredder	$n_p(\text{EasyFileShredder}) = \{0x04, 0x07, 0x1f, P(FR), P(FD)\}$ $e_p(\text{EasyFileShredder}) = \{0x04 \rightarrow P(FR), P(FR) \rightarrow 0x07, 0x07 \rightarrow 0x1f, 0x04 \rightarrow 0x1f, 0x1f \rightarrow P(FD)\}$	
File Shredder	$n_p(\text{FileShredder}) = \{0x04, 0x07, 0x1f, P(FR), P(FD)\}$ $e_p(\text{FileShredder}) = \{0x04 \rightarrow 0x07, 0x07 \rightarrow 0x1f, 0x1f \rightarrow 0x04, 0x04 \rightarrow 0x1f, 0x04 \rightarrow P(FR), P(FR) \rightarrow P(FD)\}$	
Hardwipe	$n_p(\text{Hardwipe}) = \{0x04, 0x07, 0x1f, P(FR), P(FD)\}$ $e_p(\text{Hardwipe}) = \{0x1f \rightarrow 0x04, 0x04 \rightarrow 0x07, 0x07 \rightarrow 0x1f, 0x1f \rightarrow P(FR), 0x04 \rightarrow P(FR), P(FR) \rightarrow P(FD)\}$	
Kernel File Shredder	$n_p(\text{KernelFileShredder}) = \{0x06, 0x07, 0x08, 0x1f, P(FR), P(FD)\}$ $e_p(\text{KernelFileShredder}) = \{0x06 \rightarrow 0x1f, 0x1f \rightarrow 0x08, 0x07 \rightarrow 0x1f, 0x1f \rightarrow P(FR), 0x08 \rightarrow P(FR), 0x1f \rightarrow P(FD)\}$	
PC Shredder	$n_p(\text{PCShredder}) = \{0x04, 0x07, 0x1f, P(FR), P(FD)\}$ $e_p(\text{PCShredder}) = \{0x04 \rightarrow P(FR), P(FR) \rightarrow 0x07, 0x07 \rightarrow 0x1f, 0x1f \rightarrow P(FD)\}$	
Remo File Eraser	$n_p(\text{RemoFileEraser}) = \{0x04, 0x07, 0x1f, P(FR), P(FD)\}$ $e_p(\text{RemoFileEraser}) = \{0x04 \rightarrow 0x1f, 0x1f \rightarrow 0x04, 0x07 \rightarrow 0x1f, 0x04 \rightarrow P(FR), P(FR) \rightarrow 0x07, 0x1f \rightarrow P(FD)\}$	
Secure Eraser	$n_p(\text{Secure Eraser}) = \{0x04, 0x06, 0x07, 0x08, 0x1f, P(FR), P(FD)\}$ $e_p(\text{Secure Eraser}) = \{0x06 \rightarrow 0x1f, 0x1f \rightarrow 0x04, 0x07 \rightarrow 0x1f, 0x1f \rightarrow 0x04, 0x04 \rightarrow 0x07, 0x07 \rightarrow 0x1f, 0x04 \rightarrow P(FR), P(FR) \rightarrow P(FD)\}$	
Super File Shredder	$n_p(\text{SuperFileShredder}) = \{0x04, 0x06, 0x07, 0x08, 0x1f, P(FR), P(FD)\}$ $e_p(\text{SuperFileShredder}) = \{0x04 \rightarrow 0x06, 0x06 \rightarrow 0x1f, 0x1f \rightarrow 0x08, 0x08 \rightarrow 0x04, 0x1f \rightarrow 0x04, 0x04 \rightarrow 0x1f, 0x07 \rightarrow 0x1f, 0x04 \rightarrow 0x07, 0x04 \rightarrow P(FR), P(FR) \rightarrow P(FD)\}$	
Turbo Shredder	$n_p(\text{TurboShredder}) = \{0x04, 0x07, 0x1f, P(FR), P(FD)\}$ $e_p(\text{TurboShredder}) = \{0x04 \rightarrow P(FR), P(FR) \rightarrow 0x04, 0x04 \rightarrow 0x07, 0x07 \rightarrow 0x1f, 0x1f \rightarrow P(FD)\}$	
WipeFile	$n_p(\text{WipeFile}) = \{0x04, 0x07, 0x1f, P(FR), P(FD)\}$ $e_p(\text{WipeFile}) = \{0x04 \rightarrow 0x07, 0x07 \rightarrow 0x1f, 0x1f \rightarrow 0x04, 0x04 \rightarrow P(FR), P(FR) \rightarrow 0x04, 0x04 \rightarrow P(FD)\}$	
XT File Shredder	$n_p(\text{XTFileShredder}) = \{0x04, 0x07, 0x1f, P(FR), P(FD)\}$ $e_p(\text{XTFileShredder}) = \{0x04 \rightarrow 0x1f, 0x1f \rightarrow 0x04, 0x04 \rightarrow 0x07, 0x07 \rightarrow 0x1f, 0x04 \rightarrow P(FR), P(FR) \rightarrow P(FD)\}$	
xShredder	$n_p(\text{xShredder}) = \{0x04, (0x04), 0x06, 0x07, P(FR), P(FD)\}$ $e_p(\text{xShredder}) = \{0x06 \rightarrow 0x04, 0x04 \rightarrow P(FR), (0x04) \rightarrow P(FR), 0x04 \rightarrow (0x04), P(FR) \rightarrow 0x04, 0x04 \rightarrow P(FR), 0x04 \rightarrow 0x07, (0x04) \rightarrow 0x07, 0x04 \rightarrow P(FD)\}$	

Table 8
Design of verification.

No	Validation method	File type	Number of files	Size of file (KB)	Repetition
1	Fixed-size validation	Create Dummy File using script	70	10	2
2	Fixed-size validation	Create Dummy File using script	70	50	2
3	Fixed-size validation	Create Dummy File using script	70	100	2
4	Fixed-size validation	Create Dummy File using script	70	10,240	1
5	Variable-size validation	PDF, XLS, DOC files with variable size	70	8~36,235	3
Total number of files					700
Total number of Logfiles					10

3.4.2. Filename pattern result

Transitions in File/Directory Names can also be observed in the metadata area where the Renaming pattern appears. As illustrated in Table 6, these name transitions exhibited distinct characteristics for each tool and were unaffected by the algorithms employed. In some instances, such as with Kernel File Shredder, these transitions were recurrently composed of capital letters. Conversely, others, like Hardwipe, comprised random alphabets. Identifying the variations in file name changes collectively enables the differentiation of opcode patterns even in instances of duplication.

3.5. Data wiping tool patterns

As shown in Table 7, the experimental results are represented through a diagram with nodes and edges. Opcodes within each sequence were set as nodes, and the edges connecting the nodes were used to denote the order and repetition count. This diagram comprehensively represents the existing pattern by tracking overall opcode changes and identifying specific alterations. When a node repeats, it's represented in a rotational form. The connecting link (edge) and (node) for '0x04' are shown as a dotted line to distinguish it from 0x04. Interestingly, while most tools had '0x04', '0x1f', and '0x07', Kernel File Shredder, Super File Shredder, and xShredder only include '0x06' and '0x08'. They all had different diagrams, which implies that each tool exhibits unique characteristics.

4. Implementation and verification

4.1. Implementation

To assess our approach, we developed a tool using the proposed method of opcode analysis based on the \$Logfile structure and detection of data wiping tools. We utilized a Python 3.10 development environment with Pyside and PyQt5 GUI (URL: https://github.com/jamemania/ReFS_Detector). The tool's operation is as follows: 1) Upon uploading the \$Logfile, 2) the log area is analyzed, yielding a result comprised of the file, time, and opcodes appearing in time units. The resulting fields are structured as [Detect Tool Name] – [Filename] – [Date] – [Pattern]. The Filename and Date fields were extracted from the time and filenames of the Data area's metadata. The Detect Tool Name field stores specific tool patterns, and after extracting the opcodes of the input file, 3) compares these with the analyzed patterns of the 12 tools, 4) indicating the tool name if a match is found. Moreover, 5) if a specific tool is not utilized, but the Renaming (P(FR)/P(DR)) or Deletion (P(FD)/P(DD)) pattern is embedded, the program raises an alert for potential data wiping tool usage. This program can also be updated to include patterns for new tools beyond the 12 deletion tools already incorporated.

4.2. Verification

To gauge the accuracy of the implemented program in detecting the behavior of data wiping tools, we conducted a cross-validation process

using the patterns described in Section 4.1. We used an open-source script (Matuzalem, 2022) to generate dummy files of sizes 10 KB, 50 KB, 100 KB, and 10,240 KB, in order to examine the potential impact of file size changes, similar to Hardwipe. Additionally, to assess the effectiveness of the detection capability, we utilized a dataset of PDF, XLS, and DOC files obtained from Digital Corpora (Simson Garfinkel, 2020) (Digital Corpora, 2021). By randomly applying files of different sizes from this dataset, we could verify the detection capability. For each repetition, we created a total of 70 files to be deleted one by one using each tool and algorithm combination. This allowed us to perform verification using the number of files as shown in Table 8. The dummy file was directly created on the ReFS partition through the program, and for the pdf/xls/doc files of various sizes, only deletion was performed on the already created files. All the logs were processed for deletion in the order specified in Appendix A.

As a result, we were able to successfully detect all the tools consistently. The generated log files, along with the respective tools, can be found in ReFS_Detector repository. However, in the case of Turbo's Gutmann, the log file size was exceptionally large, so we added it separately as it overwrote the existing \$Logfile.

5. Conclusion

Permanent deletion primarily aims not only to destroy evidence but also to protect privacy. Accordingly, numerous studies have been conducted on permanent deletion in various file systems. However, only a few have specifically focused on ReFS. While previous research has addressed file creation, modification, and deletion in ReFS, it only considered standard deletion. In contrast, our work has honed in on the anti-forensic issue, concentrating on the deletion behavior within wiping tools.

To detect user behavior concerning data wiping tools in ReFS, we focused that actions can be identified from the \$Logfile. It involves using the \$Logfile to detect behavior for 12 wiping tools and identifying each tool. We found a variety of patterns, yielding different results for each algorithm, and tools with the same pattern exist regardless of the algorithm. As for the P(File Deletion), both the deletion pattern and the renaming pattern were common across all tools, nearly consistent with the file renaming and file deletion patterns addressed in previous research. Therefore, we discovered that file renaming and file deletion patterns always remain when files are deleted using complete deletion tools. Our findings also revealed that the resulting data can be influenced by wiping tools, which employ deletion algorithms to overwrite files multiple times based on specific algorithms. We also uncovered the name transition in the metadata area, recorded along with the name change pattern, according to the tool used. Finally, we implemented a tool capable of detecting and identifying a data wiping tool using the analysis method and the extracted pattern. The wiping tool used was appropriately detected when we checked through the program we developed after an actual wipe. Future releases of ReFS may impact our findings. Therefore, regular updates to the tool will be necessary, as there might be minor differences in results based on the version of ReFS as we see the difference between 3.4 and 3.7.

Deletion patterns are not merely an analytical result but can also be used effectively in investigations. By storing each tool's wiping pattern in a database, the function of identifying the data wiping tool can prove wiping action by checking the results of the opcode automatic analysis. The ReFS \$Logfile size can vary based on the file system size and operation frequency, and it can be adjusted through settings. If the \$Logfile space becomes full, older behavior may be challenging to analyze as the log file will be reused. The tool that we implemented will

help digital forensic examiners determine whether the data wiping tool was used. We recommend correlating the \$Logfile findings together with other artifacts, not relying on a single source. Detecting wiping patterns during an investigation could indicate potential evidence deletion. Both the analysis method and results against the data wiping tool proposed in this study are anticipated to aid in uncovering and identifying permanent delete behavior in dedicated digital forensic investigation.

Appendix

Table A.9
Data used for variable size validation

Filename	Extention	Size (KB)
01_01_Easy_Random(70)	doc	40
01_02_Easy_Zero(69)	xls	7699
01_03_Easy_GOST(68)	pdf	144
01_04_Easy_Airforce(67)	doc	57
01_05_Easy_AR380(66)	xls	2319
01_06_Easy_DoDM3(65)	pdf	9051
01_07_Easy_DoDME(64)	doc	55
01_08_Easy_ITSG2006(63)	xls	27929
01_10_Easy_DoD28STD(62)	doc	172
01_11_Easy_DoD22MECE(61)	xls	5450
01_12_Easy_Bruce(60)	pdf	222
01_13_Easy_VISITR(59)	doc	177
01_15_Easy_Gutmann(58)	pdf	9731
02_01_FileShred_One(57)	doc	66
02_02_FileShred_Secure(56)	xls	34
02_03_DoDM3(55)	pdf	2213
02_03_Gutmann(54)	doc	175
03_01_Hard_Random(53)	xls	80
03_02_Hard_Zero(52)	pdf	222
03_03_Hard_GOST(51)	doc	57
03_04_Hard_DoDM3(50)	xls	3707
03_05_Hard_Bruce(49)	pdf	1047
03_06_Hard_VISITR(48)	doc	105
03_07_Hard_Gutmann(47)	xls	70
04_01_Kernel_Zero(46)	pdf	160
04_02_Kernel_HMG(45)	doc	173
04_03_Kernel_GOST(44)	xls	51
04_04_Kernel_AirForce(43)	pdf	593
04_05_Kernel_AR380(42)	doc	13838
04_06_Kernel_DoDM3(41)	xls	99
04_07_Kernel_VISITR(40)	pdf	8
04_08_Kernel_Gutmann(39)	doc	20
05_01_PC_DoDM3(38)	xls	90
05_02_PC_DoDMECE(37)	pdf	64
05_03_PC_Gutamann(36)	doc	1299
06_01_Remo_Random(35)	xls	14303
06_02_Remo_Zero(34)	pdf	43
06_03_Remo_DoDM3(33)	doc	138
07_01_Secure_Random(32)	xls	2757
07_02_Secure_DoDME(31)	pdf	268
07_03_Secure_DoD22MECE(30)	doc	112
07_04_Secure_VISITR(29)	xls	73
07_05_Secure_Gutmann(28)	pdf	927
08_01_Super_One(27)	doc	30
08_02_Super_Secure(26)	xls	2679
08_03_Super_DoDM3(25)	pdf	1216
08_04_Super_Gutmann(24)	doc	136
09_01_Wipe_One(23)	doc	28
09_02_Wipe_Secure(22)	xls	9252
09_03_Wipe_Random(21)	pdf	36235
09_04_Wipe_Zero(20)	doc	545
09_05_Wipe_Gutmann(19)	xls	3682
10_01_xShredder_HMG(18)	pdf	383
10_02_xShredder_GOST(17)	doc	32
10_03_xShredder_AirForce(16)	xls	7699
10_04_xShredder_AR380(15)	pdf	591
10_05_xShredder_DoDM3(14)	doc	103
10_06_xShredder_DoDMECE(13)	xls	2319
10_07_xShredder_Bruce(12)	pdf	4916
10_08_xShredder_VISITR(11)	doc	90

(continued on next page)

Table A.9 (continued)

Filename	Extention	Size (KB)
10_09_xShredder_RCMP(10)	xls	27929
10_10_xShredder_Gutmann(09)	pdf	177
11_01_XT_DoDM3(08)	doc	425
11_02_XT_DoDME(07)	xls	5450
11_03_XT_One(06)	doc	95
12_01_Turbo_One(05)	xls	2790
12_02_Turbo_Secure(04)	pdf	158
12_03_Turbo_Random(03)	doc	6411
12_04_Turbo_Zero(02)	xls	3065
12_05_Turbo_Gutmann(01)	pdf	46

Table A.10

Wiping Tool List and Functions(O: Available, -: Unavailable, Δ: Delete only subdir)

Function/Tool	Easy File Shredder	File Shredder	Hard Wipe	Kernel File Shredder	PC Shredder	Remo File Eraser	Secure Eraser	Super File Shredder	Turbo Shredder	Wipe File	xShredder	XT File Shredder
Wipe File	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Wipe Directory	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	-	O	Δ	O
Repeat Option	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Speed Option	-	-	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Zero After Wipe	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	O	O	-	-	-
Cleanup Drive/Disk	O	-	O	-	-	O	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cleanup Recycle bin	-	-	O	O	-	O	-	-	-	-	O	O
Cleanup Pagefile	-	-	O	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	O	-
Cleanup Free Space	O	O	O	-	-	O	-	-	-	-	O	-
Cleanup System File	-	-	-	O	-	-	O	-	-	-	-	-
Cleanup Registry	-	-	-	-	-	-	O	-	-	-	-	-
Cleanup Useless File	-	-	-	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
MultiTask	O	O	-	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Schedule Task	-	-	-	O	-	O	O	-	-	-	O	-
Log	-	-	O	O	-	-	O	-	-	O	-	O
Report	-	-	-	-	-	-	O	-	-	-	-	-

Table A.11

Data Wiping Pattern Results (ReFS version 3.4)

Algorithm	File Deletion Pattern	Directory Deletion Pattern
Easy File Shredder		
Random, Zero	P(FR)*3→P(FD)	P(DR)*2→P(DD)
GOST P50739-95	P(FR)*4→P(FD)	
Air Force 5020, AR380-19, DoD 5220.M 3, ITSG2006		
DoD 5220.M E	P(FR)*5→P(FD)	P(DR)*4→P(DD)
DoD 5220.28 STD, DoD 5220.22 M E C E, Bruce Schneier, German VISITR	P(FR)*9→P(FD)	P(DR)*8→P(DD)
Peter Gutmann	P(FR)*37→P(FD)	P(DR)*36→P(DD)
File Shredder		
All	0x04*3→P(FR)→P(FD)	P(DR)→0x04→0x03*2→P(DD)
Hardwipe		
Zero	0x06→0x04*2 → 0x08→0x04*3 → 0x07→0x04*2→(0x04)→ (FR)*3→P(FD)	P(DR)*3→P(DD)
DOD 5220.22 M	0x06→0x04*2 → 0x08→0x04*5 → 0x07→0x04*2→(0x04)→P(FR)*3→P(FD)	
GOST P50739	0x06→0x04*2 → 0x08→0x04*7 → 0x07→0x04*2→(0x04)→P(FR)*3→P(FD)	
Bruce Schneier, VSITR	0x06→0x04*2 → 0x08→0x04*15 → 0x07→0x04*2 (0x04)→P(FR)*3→P(FD)	
Peter Gutmann	0x06→0x04*2 → 0x08→0x04*71 → 0x07→0x04*2→(0x04)→P(FR)*3→P(FD)	
Kernel File Shredder		
All	0x04→0x04→P(FR)→P(FD)	P(DR)→P(DD)
PC Shredder		
All	P(FR)→P(FD)	P(DR)→0x04→P(DD)

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Table A.11 (continued)

Algorithm	File Deletion Pattern	Directory Deletion Pattern
Remo File Eraser		
All	0x04→P(FR)→P(FD)	P(DR)→P(DD)
Secure Eraser		
All	0x04→P(FR)*9→P(FD)	P(DR)*9→P(DD)
Super File Shredder		
One, DoD 5220 22M, Secure Eraser	0x04→{0x06→0x04*2 → 0x08→0x04*2}(3)→0x04*2 → 0x07→0x04*2→(0x04)→P(FR)→P(FD)	P(DR)→P(DD)
Gutmann	0x04→{0x06→0x04*2 → 0x08→0x04*2}(15)→0x04*2 → 0x07→0x04*2→(0x04)→P(FR)→P(FD)	
TurboShredder		
Zero, One, Secure Peter Gutmann	0x04→P(FR)*4 → 0x04(0x04)*2→(0x04) →P(FD) 0x04→P(FR) →(0x04) →P(FD)	Not Available
WipeFile		
All	0x04*2→P(FR)→0x04*3→P(FD)	0x04→0x03*2→P(DR)→0x04→0x04→[0x03*2 → 0x04*2]*3→P(DD)
xShredder		
All	0x06→0x04*4→(0x04)→P(FR)→0x04(0x04)*6 → 0x07→0x04→P (FD)	Not Available
XT File Shredder		
All	0x04*3→P(FR)→P(FD)	P(DD)

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