Reliably Erasing Data from Flash-Based Solid State Drives

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University of California, San Diego

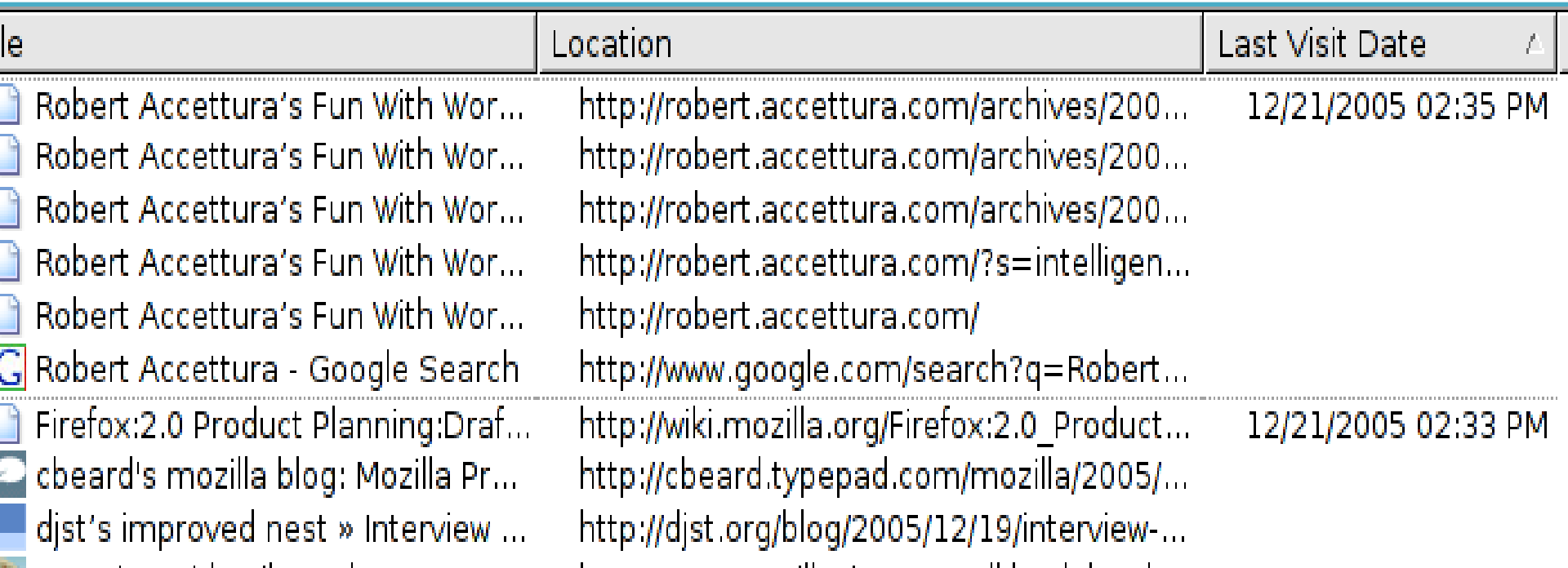
Confidential Data

sensitive information which…

- Limited to people with need
- Destroyed at end of life

YOU…

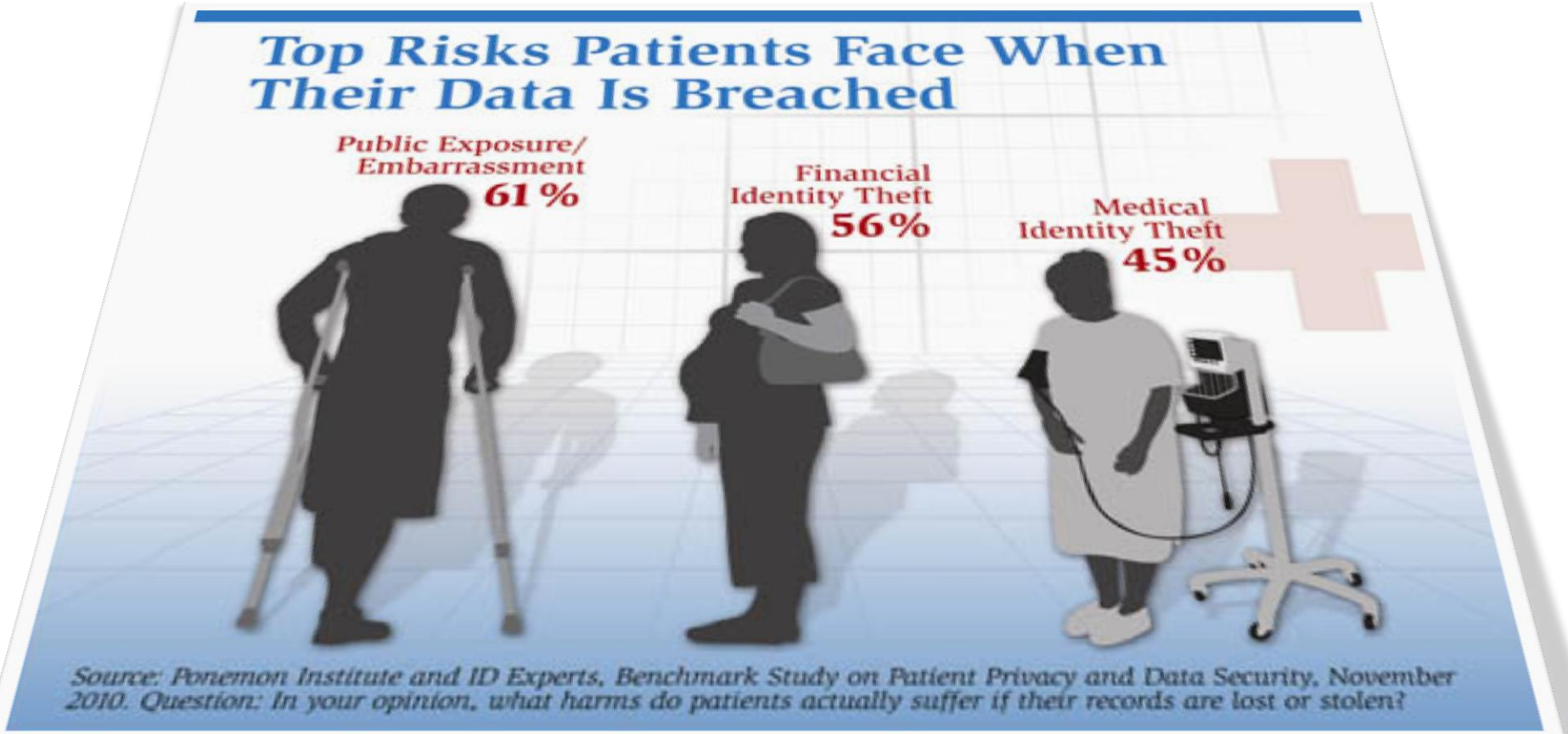
have confidential data on your computer right now!



le	Location	Last Visit Date
Robert Accettura's Fun With Wor...	http://robert.accettura.com/archives/200...	12/21/2005 02:35 PM
Robert Accettura's Fun With Wor...	http://robert.accettura.com/archives/200...	
Robert Accettura's Fun With Wor...	http://robert.accettura.com/archives/200...	
Robert Accettura's Fun With Wor...	http://robert.accettura.com/?s=intelligen...	
Robert Accettura's Fun With Wor...	http://robert.accettura.com/	
Robert Accettura - Google Search	http://www.google.com/search?q=Robert...	
Firefox:2.0 Product Planning:Draf...	http://wiki.mozilla.org/Firefox:2.0_Product...	12/21/2005 02:33 PM
cbeard's mozilla blog: Mozilla Pr...	http://cbeard.typepad.com/mozilla/2005/...	
djst's improved nest » Interview ...	http://djst.org/blog/2005/12/19/interview-...	

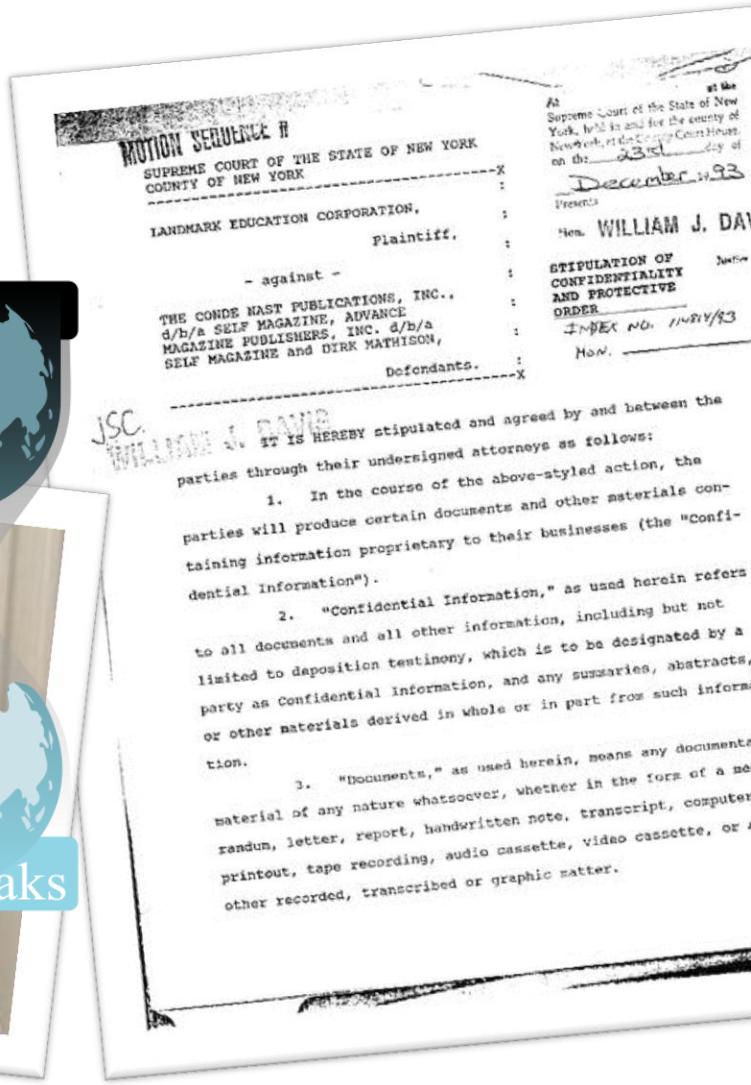
CORPORATIONS…

must protect their own data as well as client's data.



GOVERNMENTS…

must protect information
to protect the state and
lives of its citizens



MOTION SEQUENCE #

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK
COUNTY OF NEW YORK

LANDMARK EDUCATION CORPORATION,

Plaintiff,

- against -

THE CONDE NAST PUBLICATIONS, INC., d/b/a SELF MAGAZINE, ADVANCE MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS, INC. d/b/a SELF MAGAZINE and DIRK MATHISON,

Defendants.

STIPULATION OF CONFIDENTIALITY AND PROTECTIVE ORDER

INDEX NO. 11881/93

IT IS HEREBY stipulated and agreed by and between the parties through their undersigned attorneys as follows:

1. In the course of the above-styled action, the parties will produce certain documents and other materials containing information proprietary to their businesses (the "Confidential Information").

2. "Confidential Information," as used herein refers to all documents and all other information, including but not limited to deposition testimony, which is to be designated by a party as Confidential Information, and any summaries, abstracts, or other materials derived in whole or in part from such information.

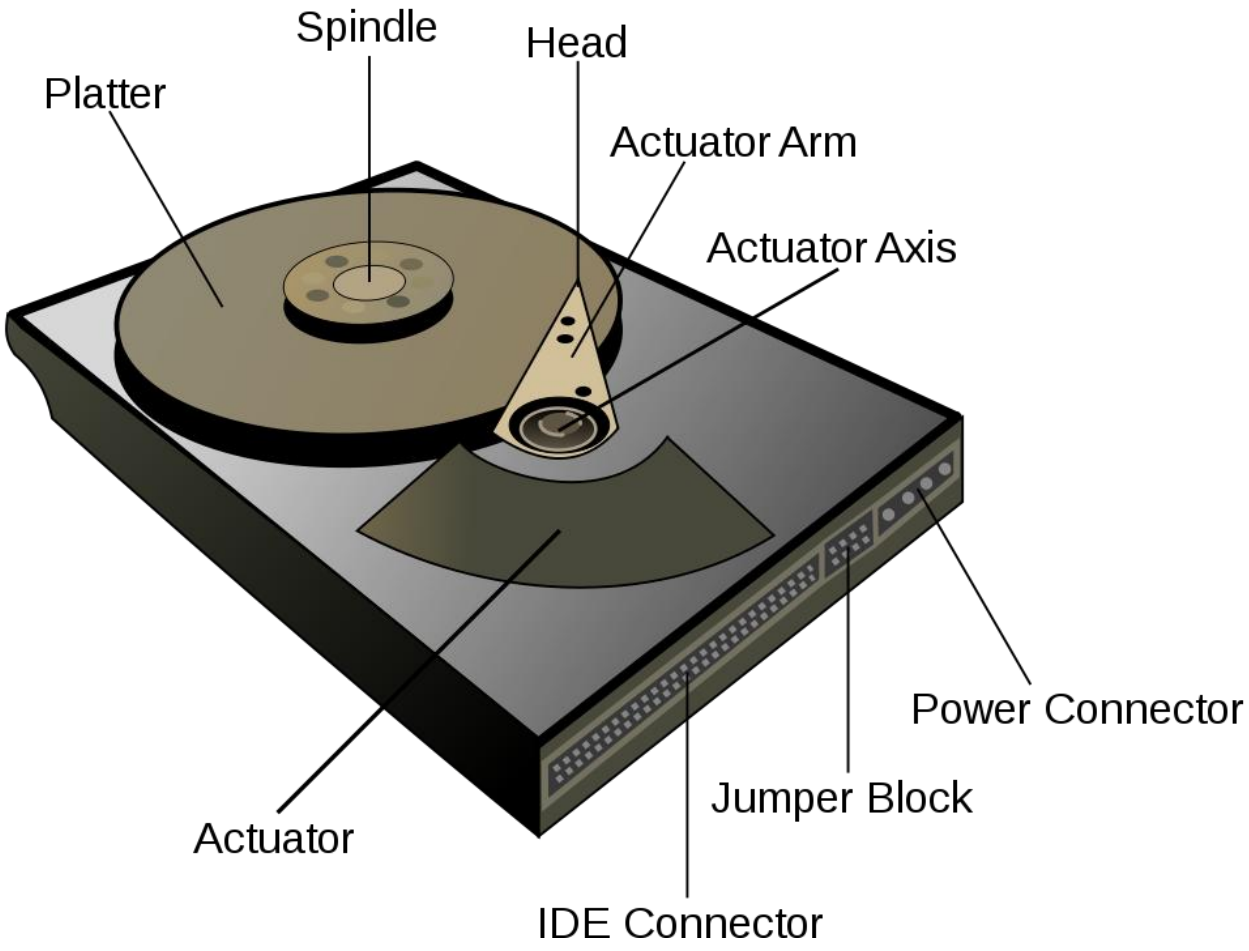
3. "Documents," as used herein, means any documents material of any nature whatsoever, whether in the form of a memorandum, letter, report, handwritten note, transcript, computer printout, tape recording, audio cassette, video cassette, or other recorded, transcribed or graphic matter.

Confidential Data

sensitive information which…

- Limited to people with need
- Destroyed at end of life

How?

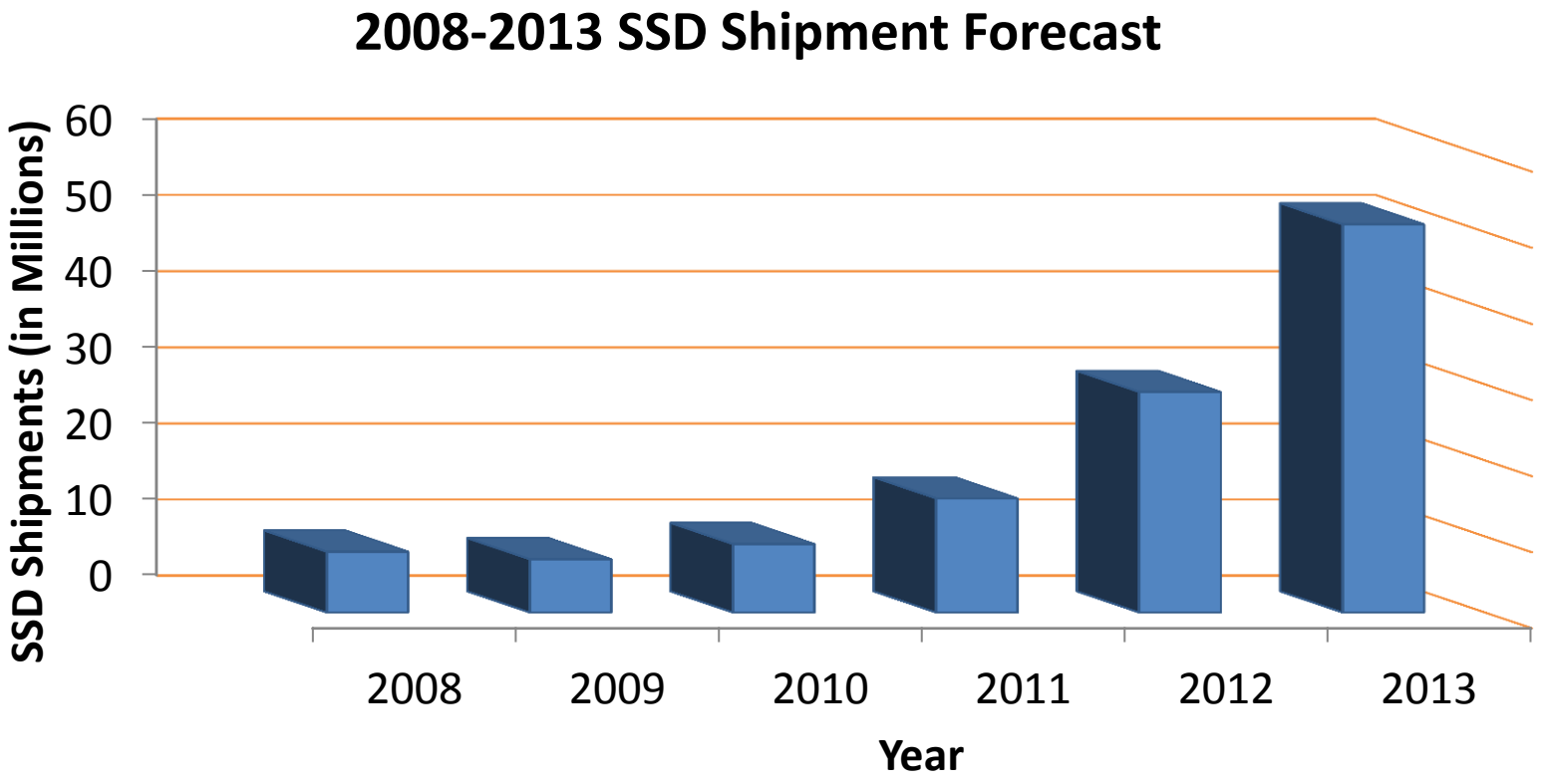


What we know comes from years of research on hard drives.

Solid State Disks (SSDs)

next generation storage…

- Flash-based
- No moving parts
- Uses a complex controller (Flash Translation Layer)

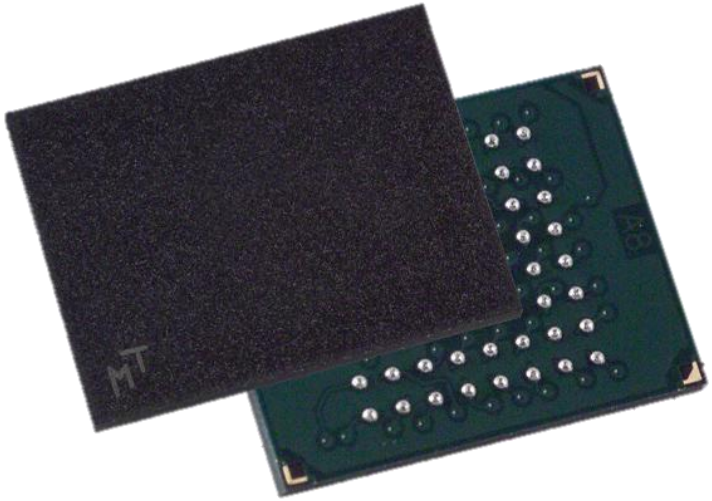


Source: DRAMeXchange

SSDs are becoming quite popular…

You might have left confidential data
and not even realized it.

Why is it hard to erase SSDs?



Current sanitization tools are designed for hard drives.

But SSDs are very different!

SSD Differences

- Recovery process is cheap
- Wide space of manufacturers for poor implementation
- Easy Disassembly / Reassembly

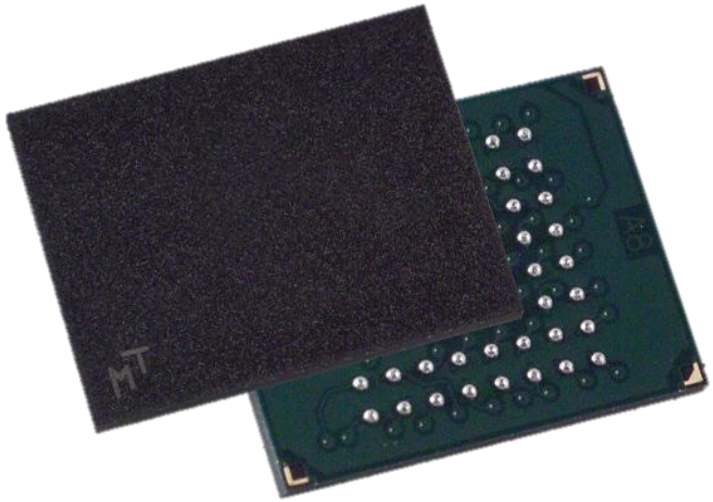
- Low cost compared to hard drives
- Someone could steal your data overnight!

Overview

- Motivation
- **Sanitization Background**
- Validating Sanitization and Results
- Single-File Sanitization Enhancement

Sanitization

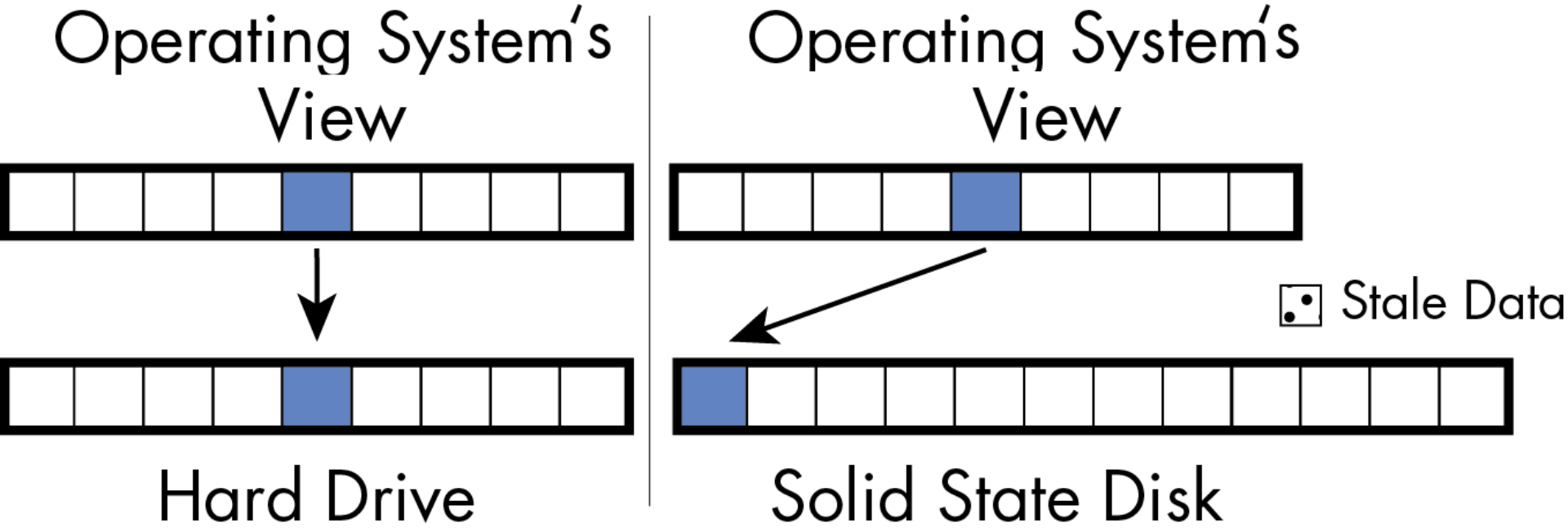
Erasing data so that it is difficult or impossible to recover



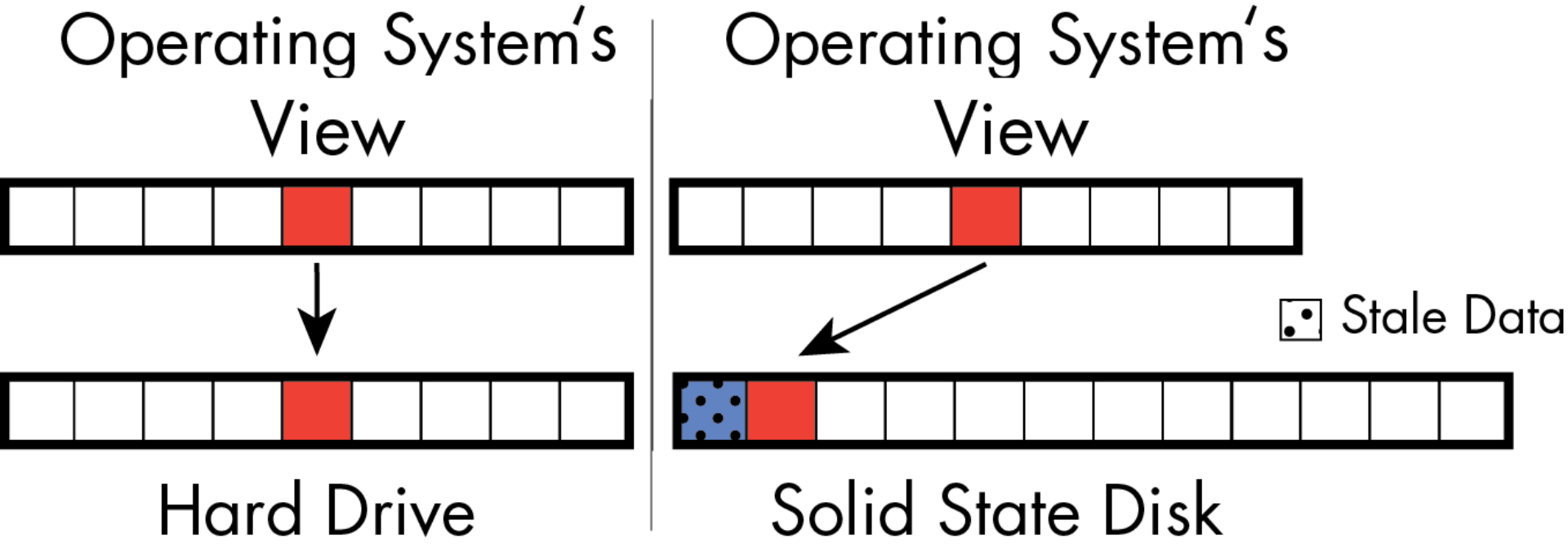
For this talk, we'll talk about the chip level.

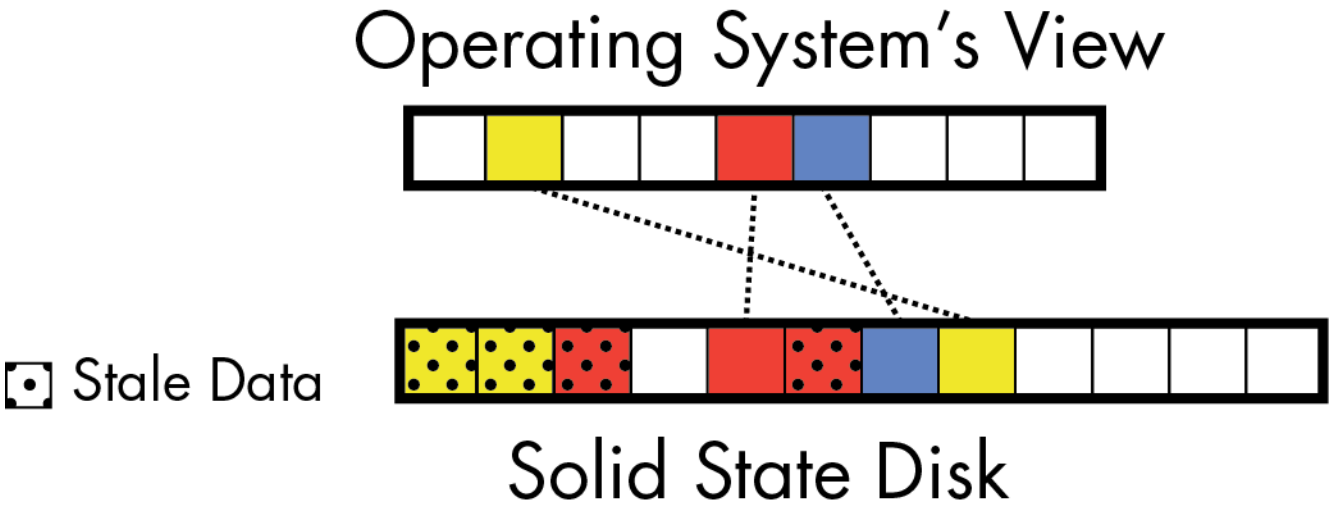
- There's leftover data
- It's cheap
- The next level is much more complex

Writing Data



Writing more data…





Lots of stale data can be left over on the drive…

Overview

- Motivation
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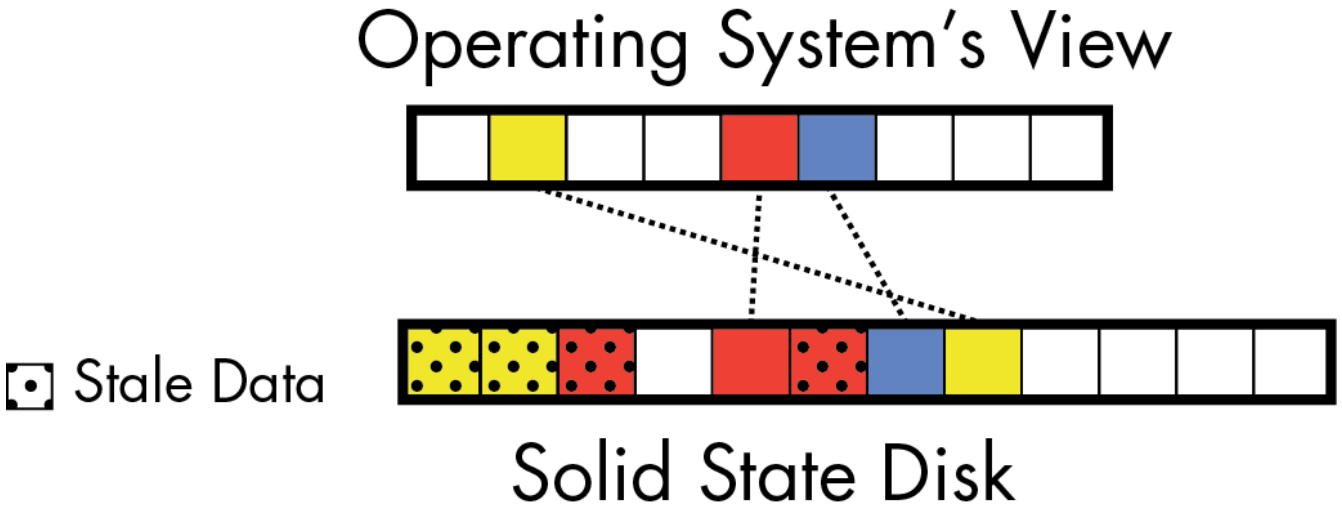
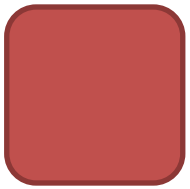
- **Validating Sanitization and Results**
- Single-File Sanitization Enhancement

We now want to measure the stale data left over.

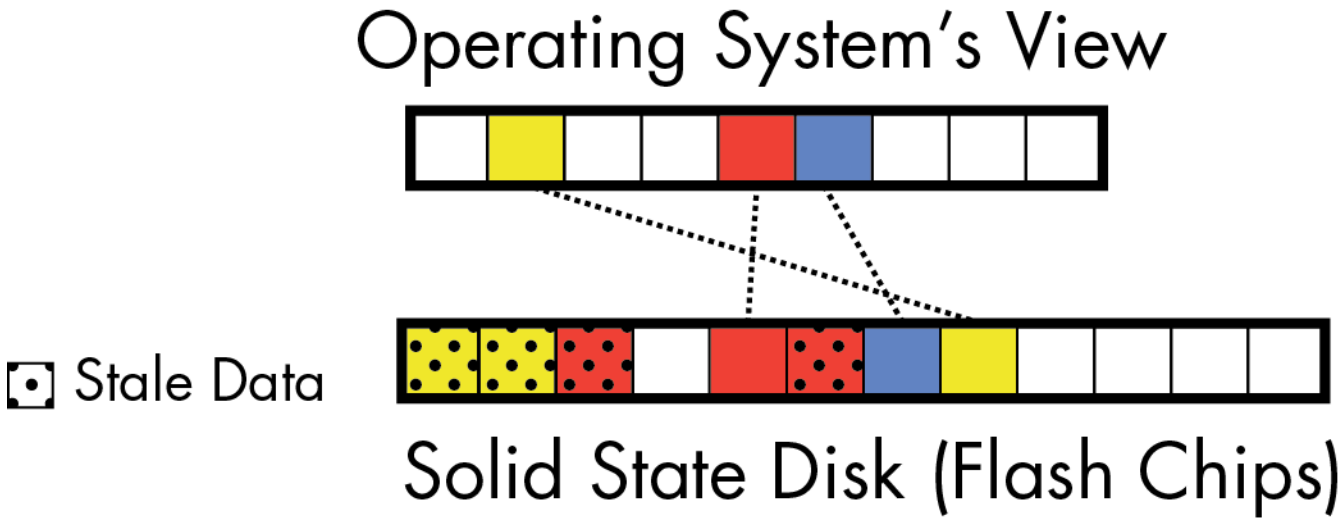


First, we constructed a "fingerprint" that was easily identifiable.



← Special Identifiers
Unique Patterns
Checksum

Second, We needed a way to see more than what the operating system sees.



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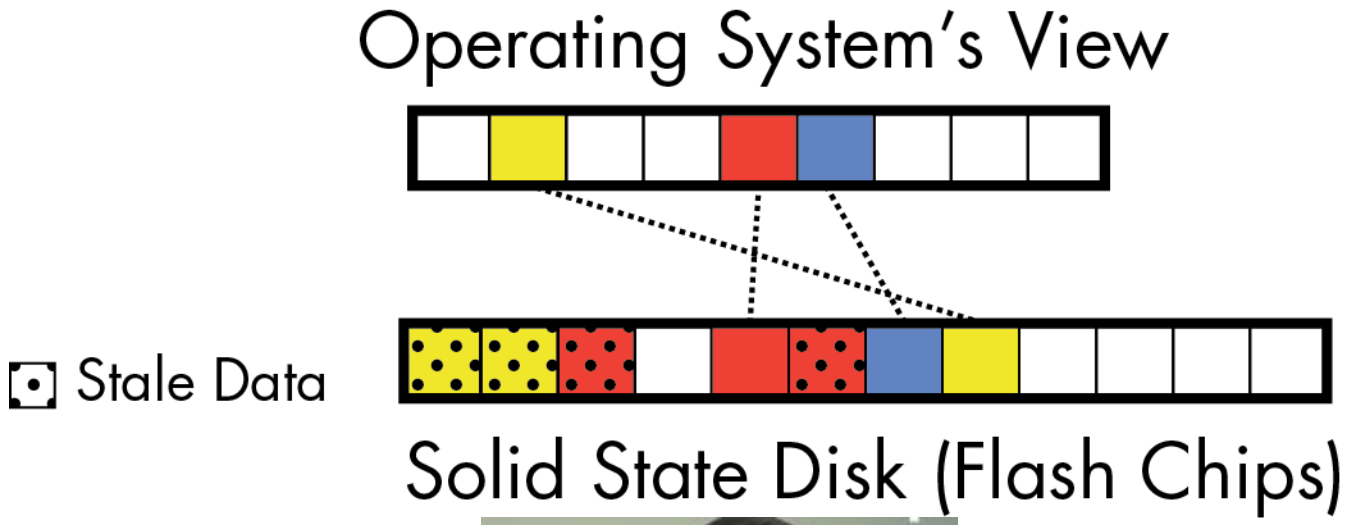
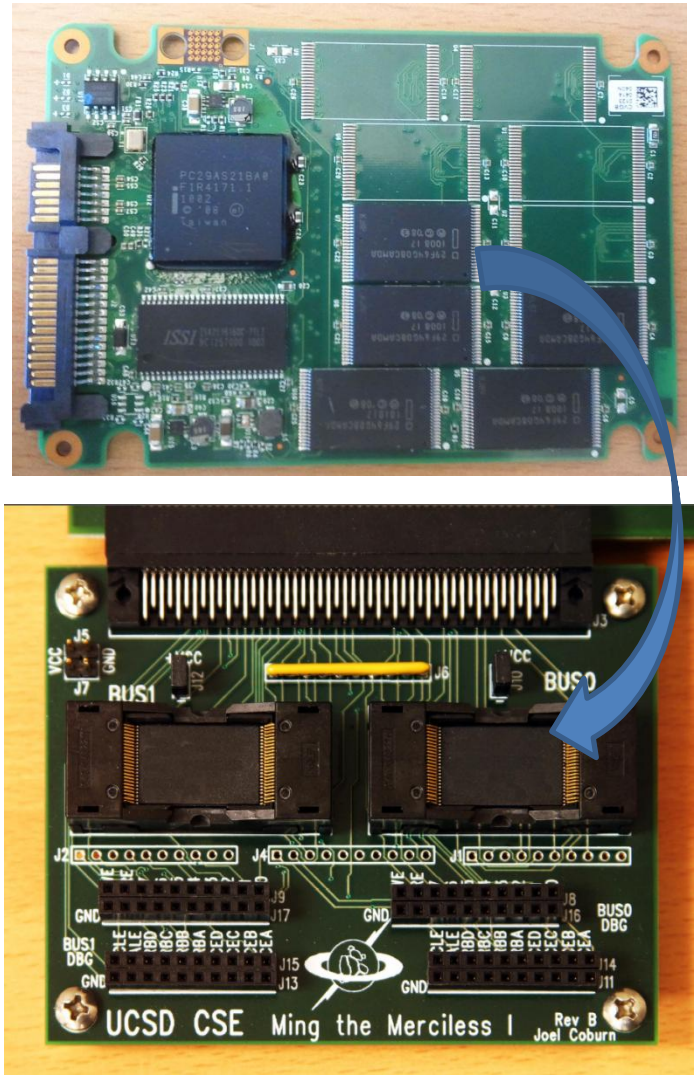
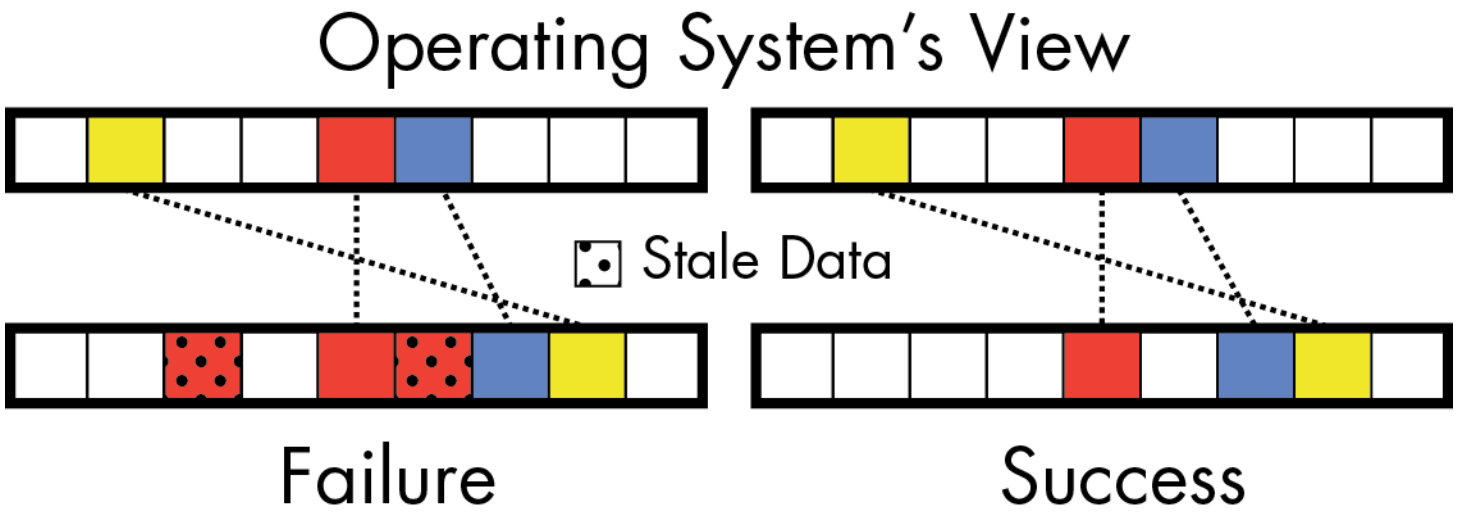


We built a custom hardware platform to extract data off the chips.



The drive is successfully sanitized if* no stale data is left over.



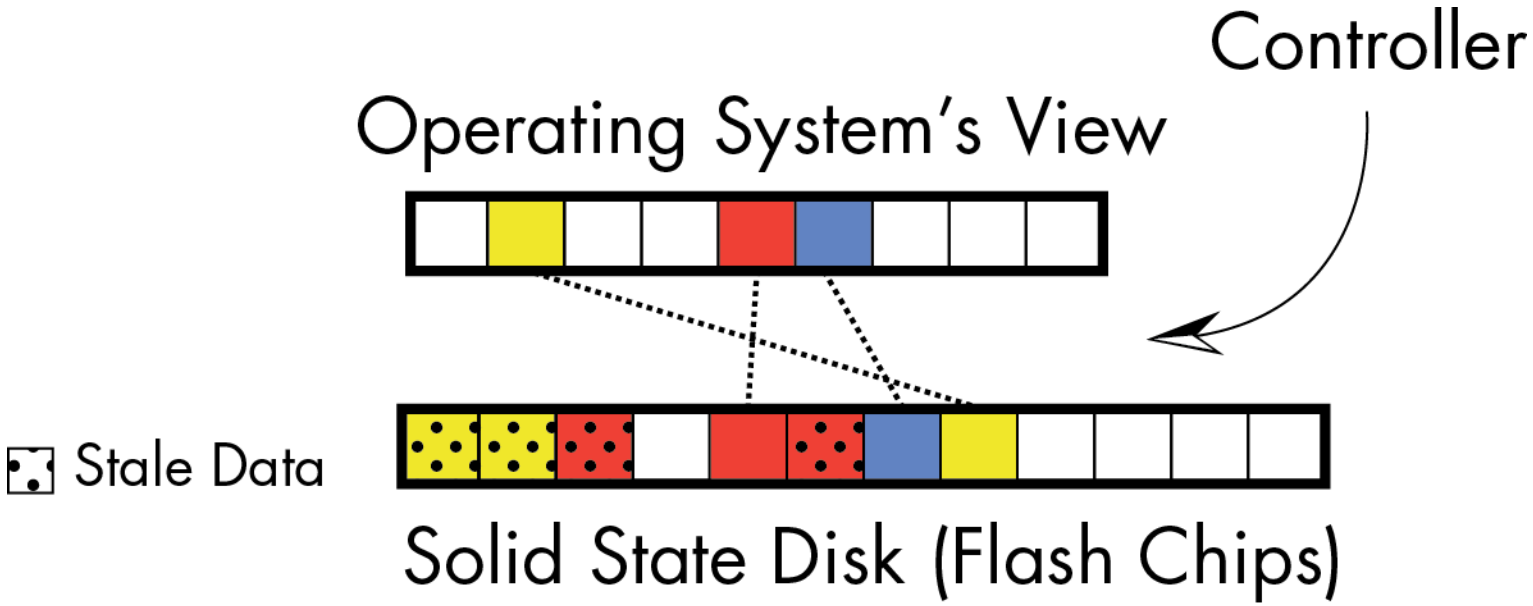
Whole-disk sanitization

Erase the whole disk so that no old data remains.

- **Built-in Commands**
  - ATA Security "Erase Unit" (ATA-3), 1995
  - Cryptographic techniques
- **Software Overwrite**
  - Various Standards

Built-in commands

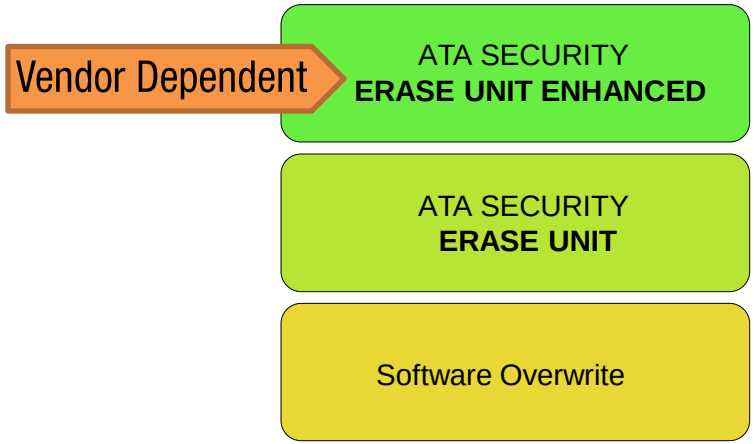
- ATA Security "Erase Unit"



ATA Security Erase Enhanced

Some drives tested supported and passed

SSD Name	Controller	SECURITY ERASE UNIT (ATA-3)	SECURITY ERASE UNIT ENHANCED (ATA-3)
A	1	No	No
B	2	No (Reports yes)	No
C	1	Partial (Bugged)	No
D	3	Partial (Bugged)	No
E	4	Crypto Scrambles	Crypto Scrambles
F	5	Yes	Yes
G	6	Yes	No
H	7	Yes	Yes
I	8	Yes	Yes



ATA Security Erase Unit

One drive reported success, even though all data remained.

SSD Name	Controller	SECURITY ERASE UNIT (ATA-3)	SECURITY ERASE UNIT ENHANCED (ATA-3)
A	1	No	No
B	2	No (Reports yes)	No
C	1	Partial (Bugged)	No
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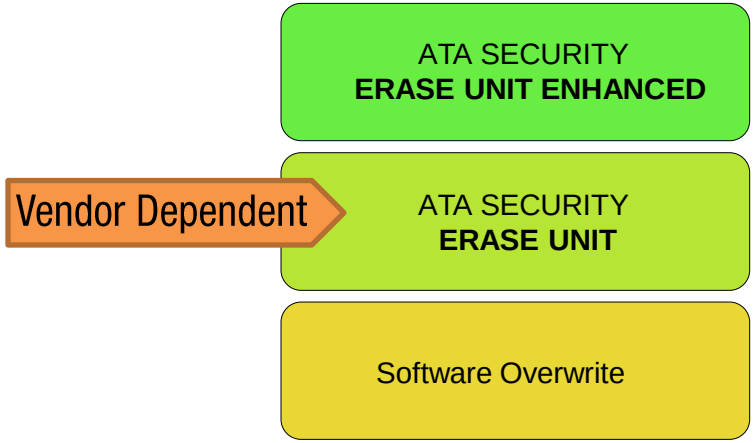
G	6	Yes	No
H	7	Yes	Yes
I	8	Yes	Yes



ATA Security Erase Unit

- Others only worked after the drive was reset

SSD Name	Controller	SECURITY ERASE UNIT (ATA-3)	SECURITY ERASE UNIT ENHANCED (ATA-3)
A	1	No	No
B	2	No (Reports yes)	No
C	1	Partial (Bugged)	No
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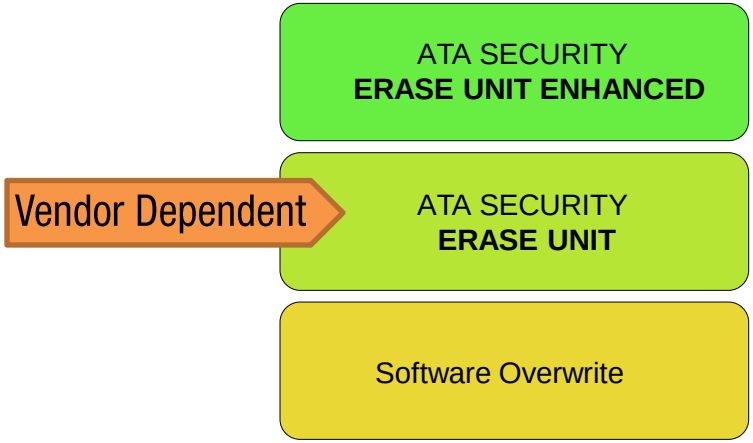
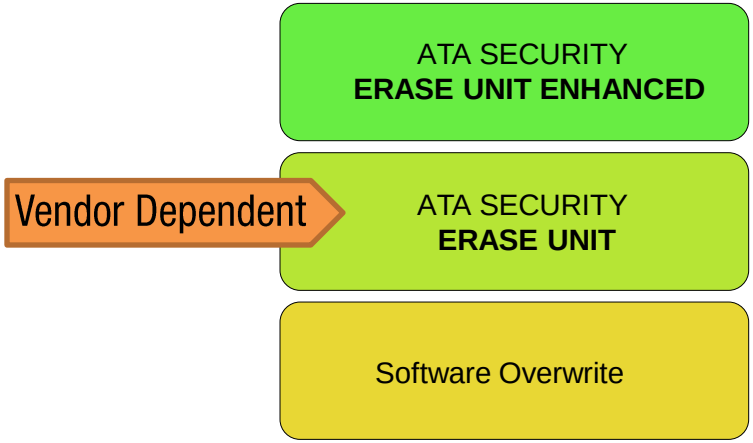


ATA Security Erase Unit

- Some drives crypto-scrambled, so we could not verify them

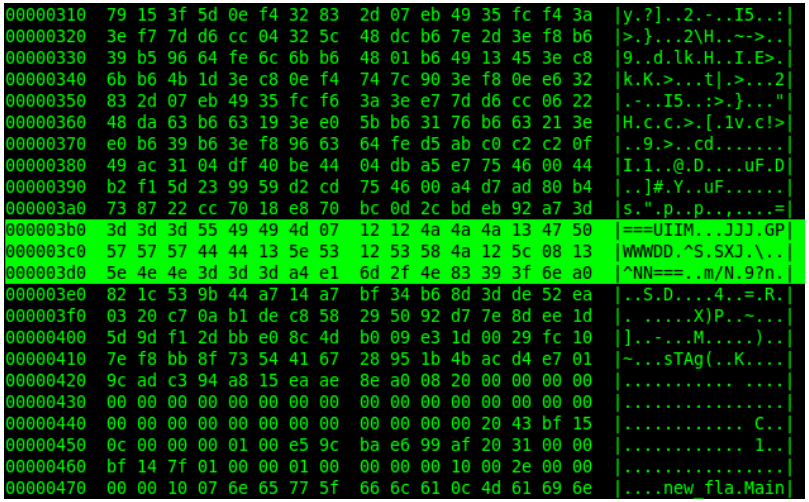
SSD Name	Controller	SECURITY ERASE UNIT (ATA-3)	SECURITY ERASE UNIT ENHANCED (ATA-3)
A	1	No	No
B	2	No (Reports yes)	No
C	1	Partial (Bugged)	No
D	3	Partial (Bugged)	No
E	4	Crypto Scrambles	Crypto Scrambles
F	5	Yes	Yes
G	6	Yes	No
H	7	Yes	Yes
I	8	Yes	Yes



Crypto-Scramble

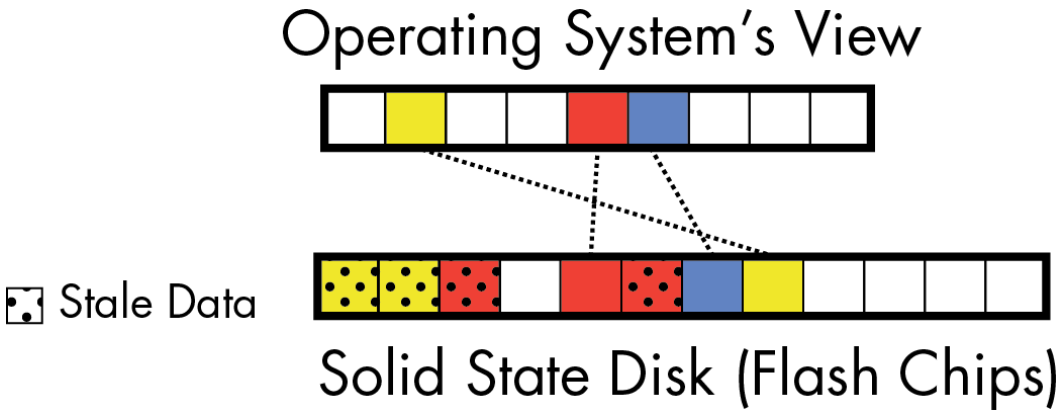
Works by deleting key

- Fast, but…
  - Encrypted data remains
  - Someone could "crack the code"
  - Not really sanitization
- Data isn't erased
- Crypto scramble makes drives unverifiable

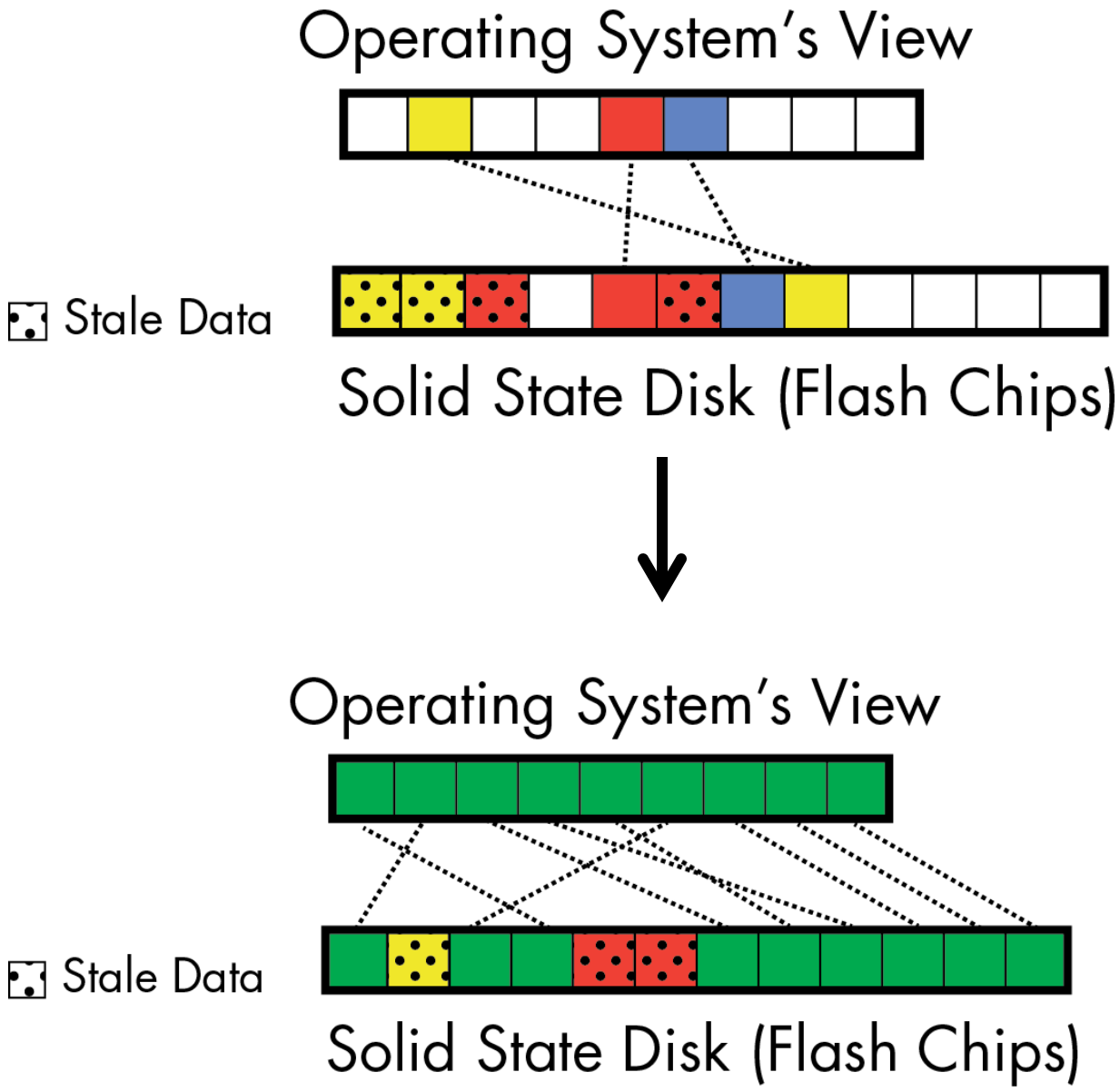


Software overwrite

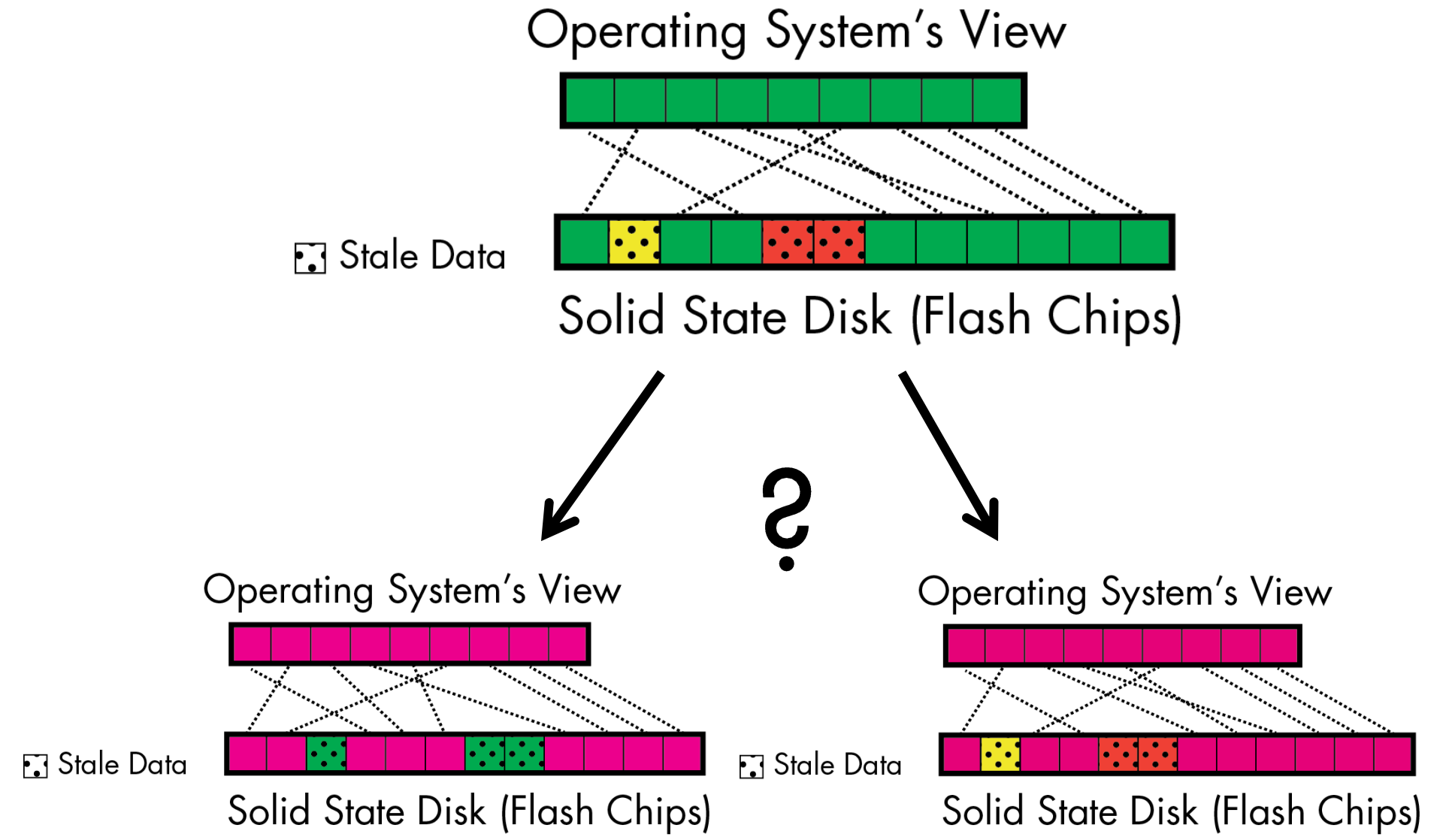
- Various Government Standards
- According to NIST 800-88 (2006) "Studies today have shown that most of today's media can be effectively cleared by one overwrite."



Software overwrite



Software overwrite



How many times?

Our experiments show 2 passes are ***typically*** necessary

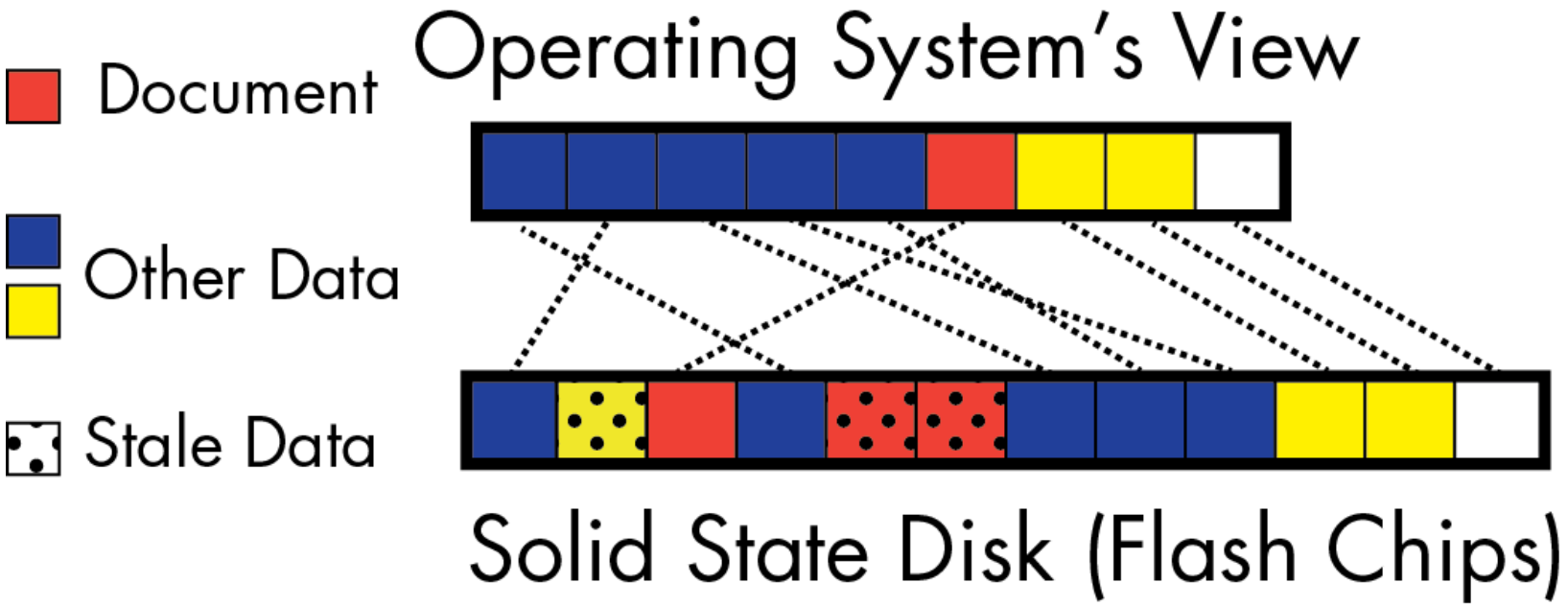
But even on the same drive, the number of required passes varied between 2 to more than 20.

Unreliable - hardware commands are best, if they are correctly implemented.

Single-File Sanitization

Erasing single files while leaving other parts of the drive intact

We want to sanitize only part of the disk.



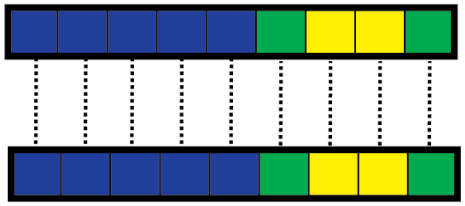
Let's try overwriting it…

Document

Other Data

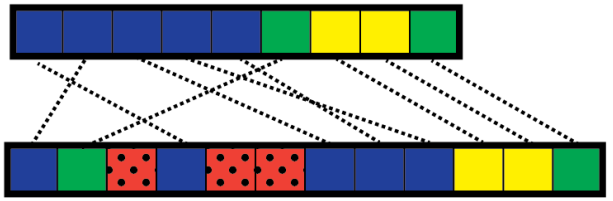
Stale Data

Operating System's View



Hard Drive

Operating System's View



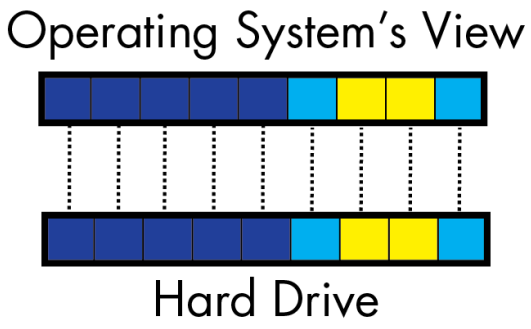
Solid State Disk (Flash Chips)

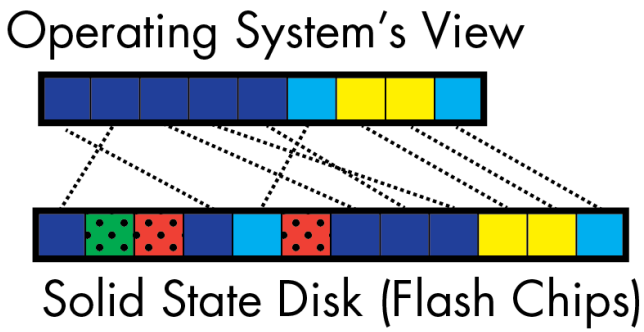
And again…

Document

Other Data

Stale Data

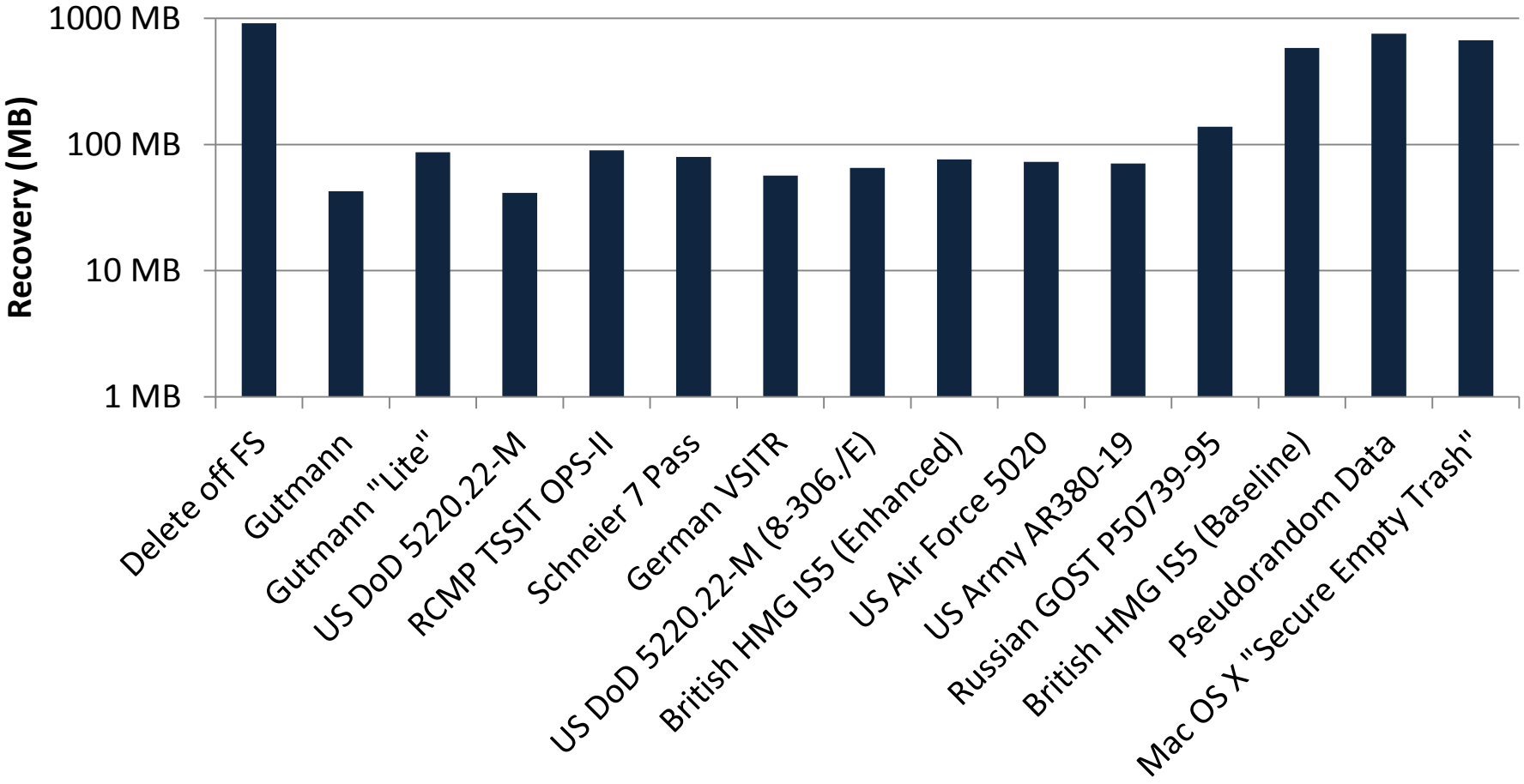




It's kind of like… Plinko.

Hopefully, the ball will land on your file.

We tested with a 1000MB file, and got pretty bad results…

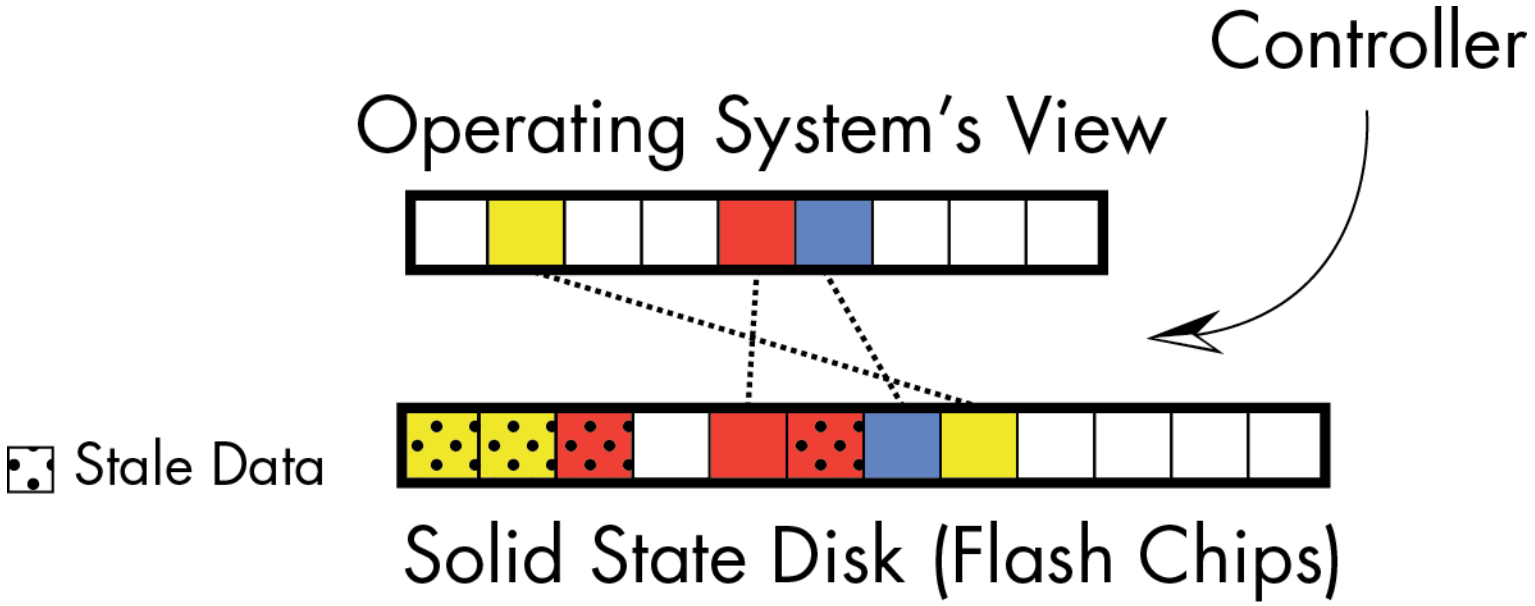


We tried to augment the existing procedures to do better…

- Wipe the free space
- Defragment and wipe

…but that didn't help at all.

We'd like a hardware command that would tell the controller…



Overview

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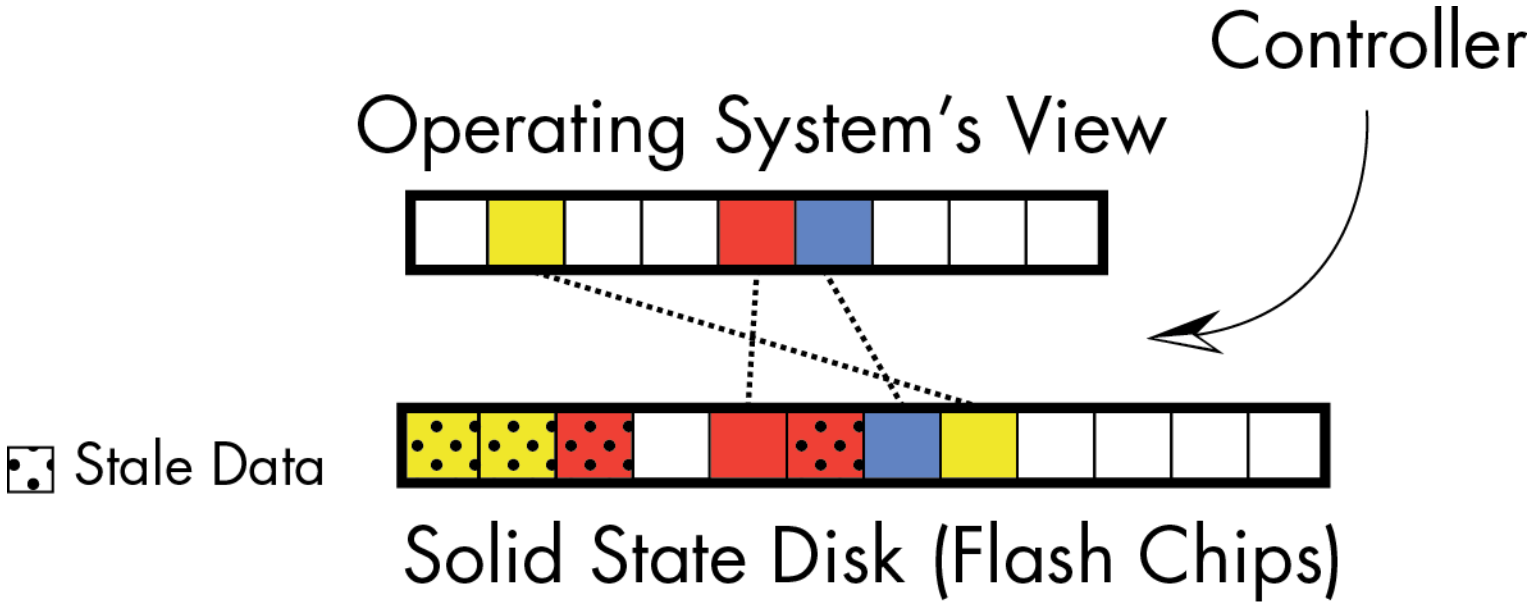
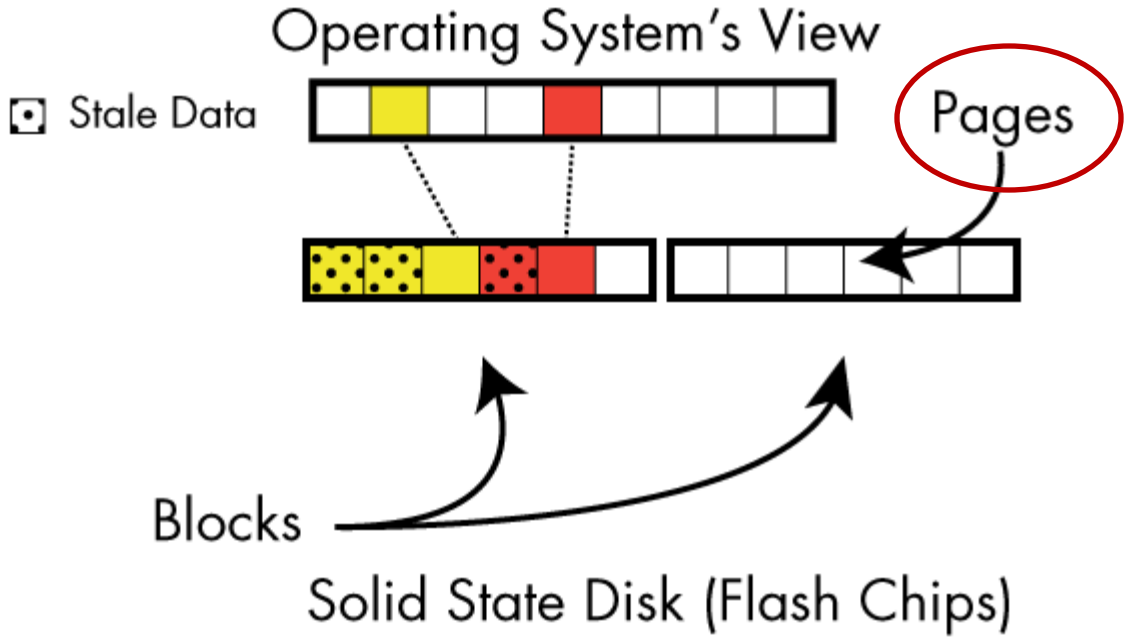
Scrubbing

An enhancement to the FTL to sanitize single files

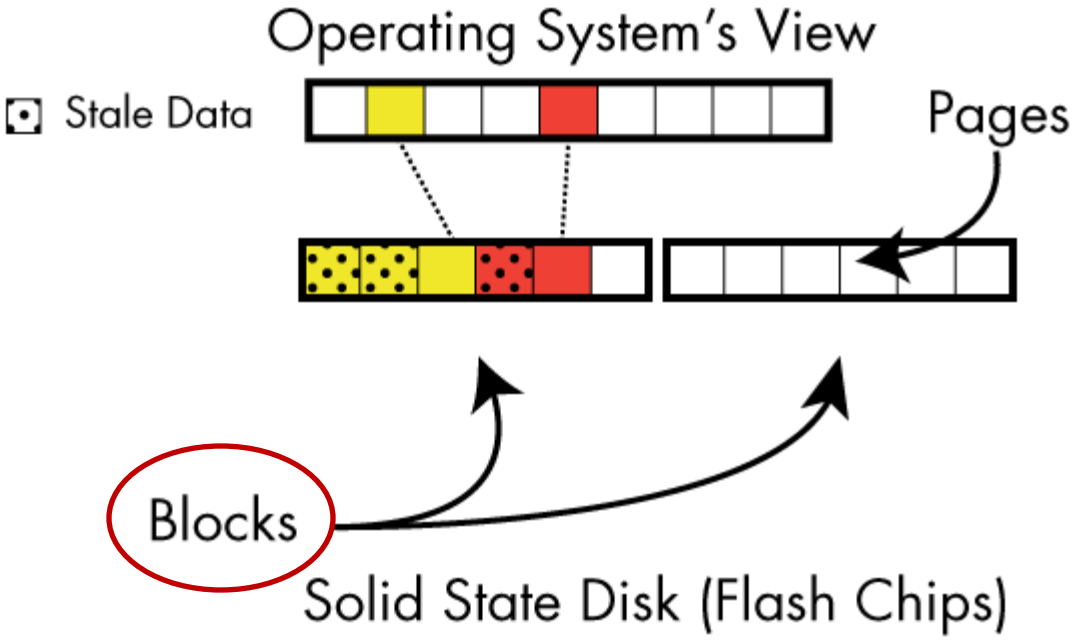
Unfortunately, it's not that easy.



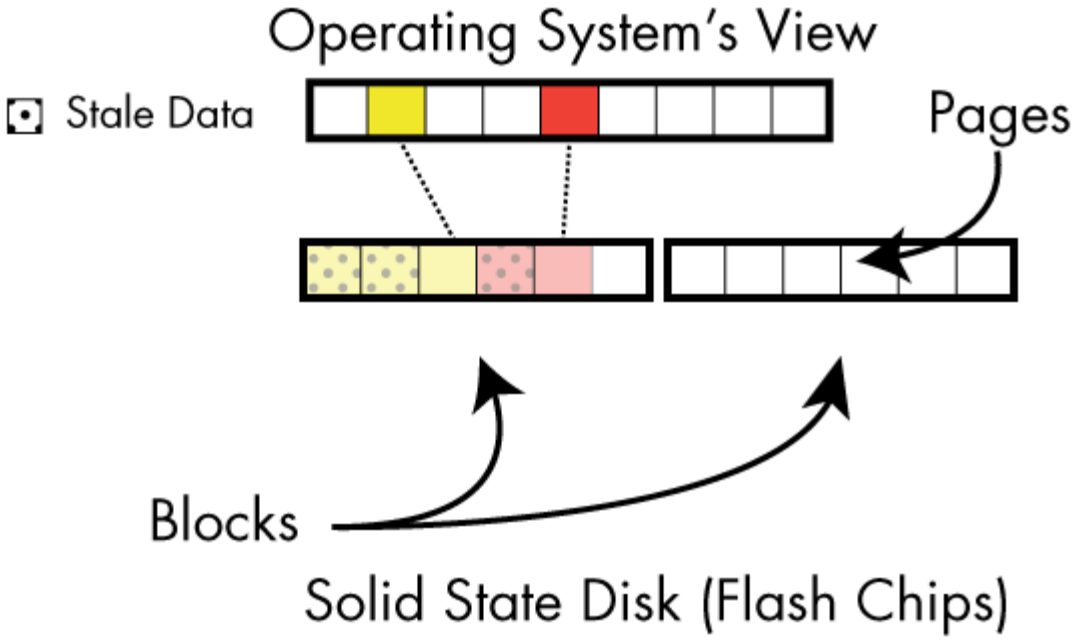
First, flash is arranged into areas we can write to called pages.



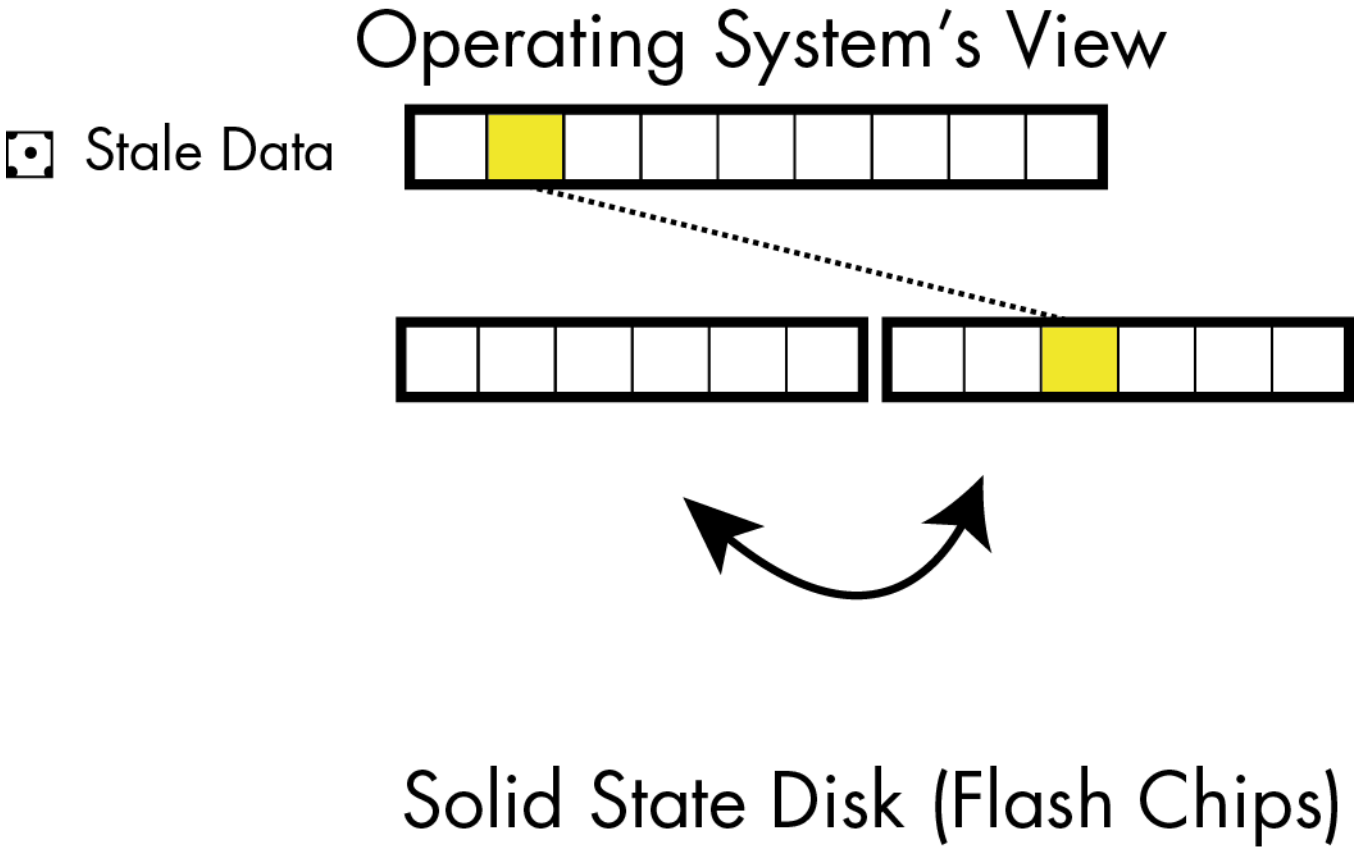
And pages are arranged into larger sections we can erase called blocks.



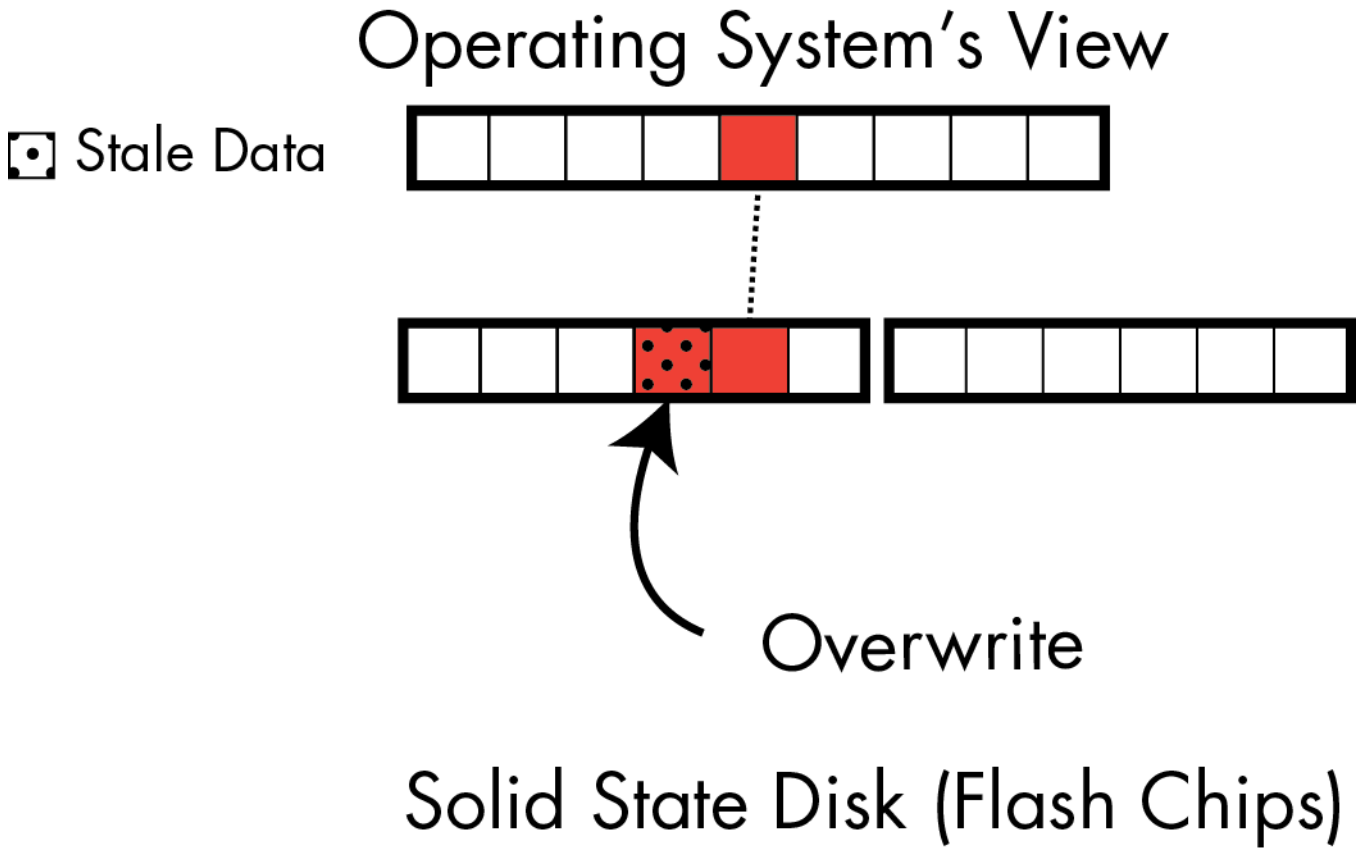
So… getting erasing one piece of data would get erase of everything else



One method to get around the limitation is to copy.. But that's slow!



We can overwrite individual pages



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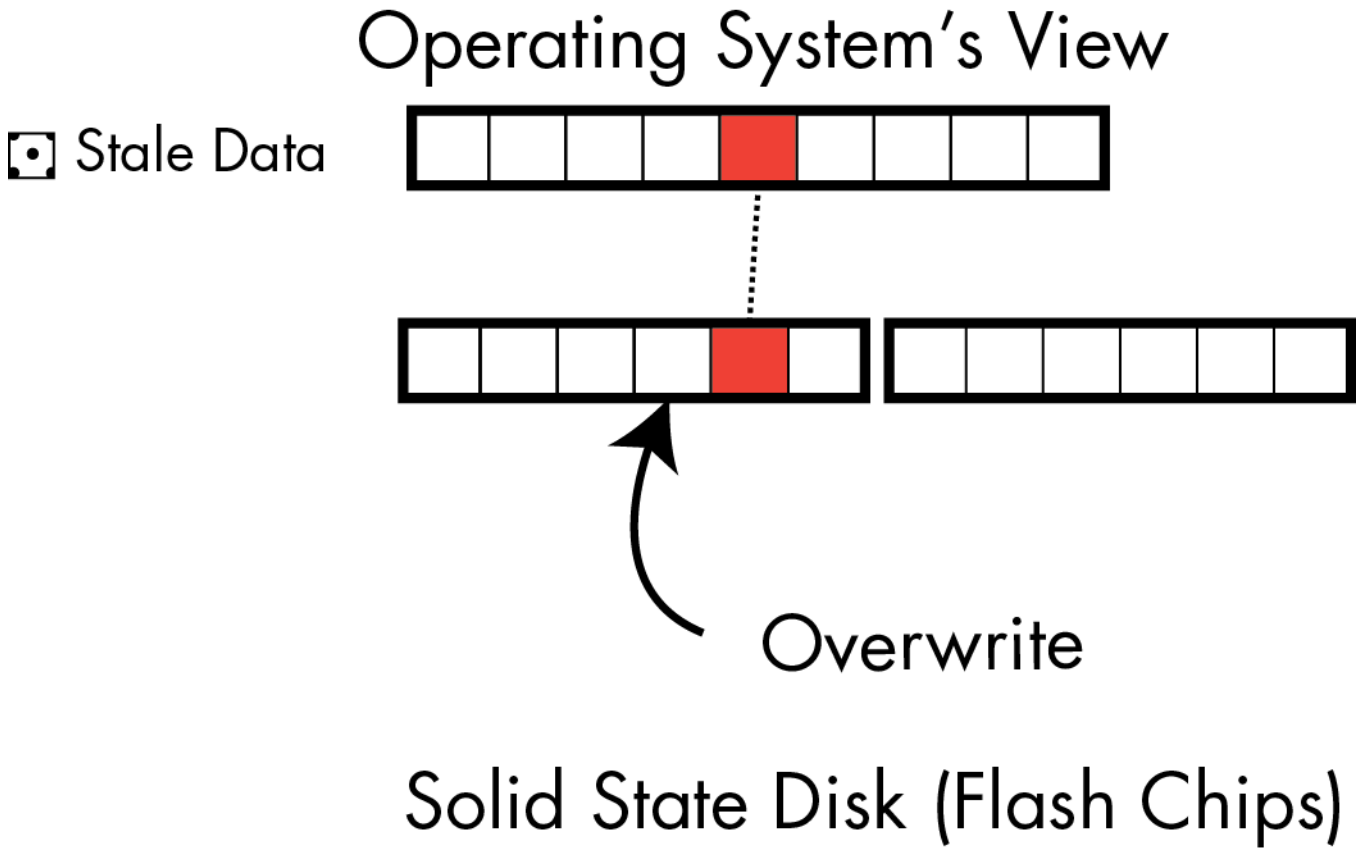
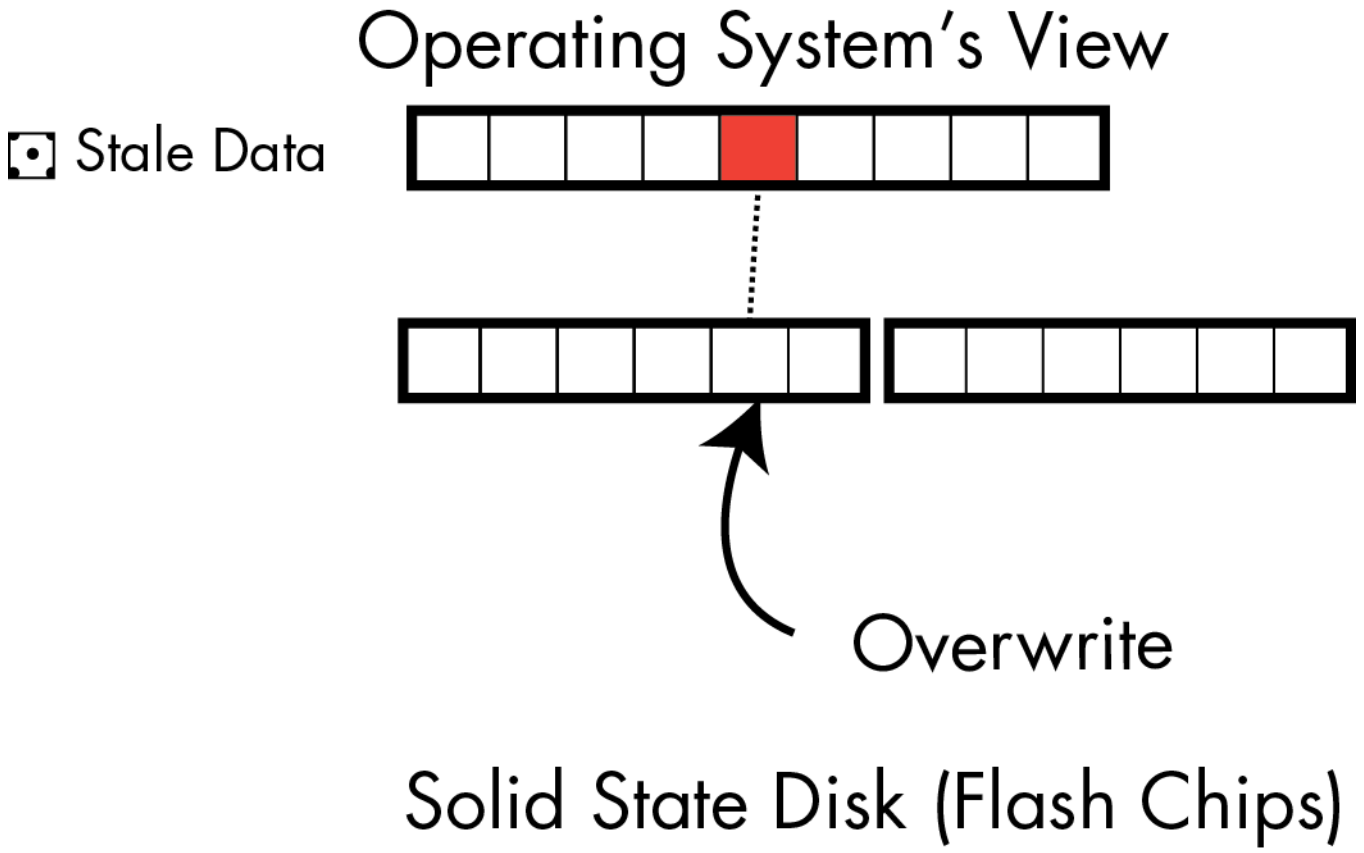


We can overwrite individual pages



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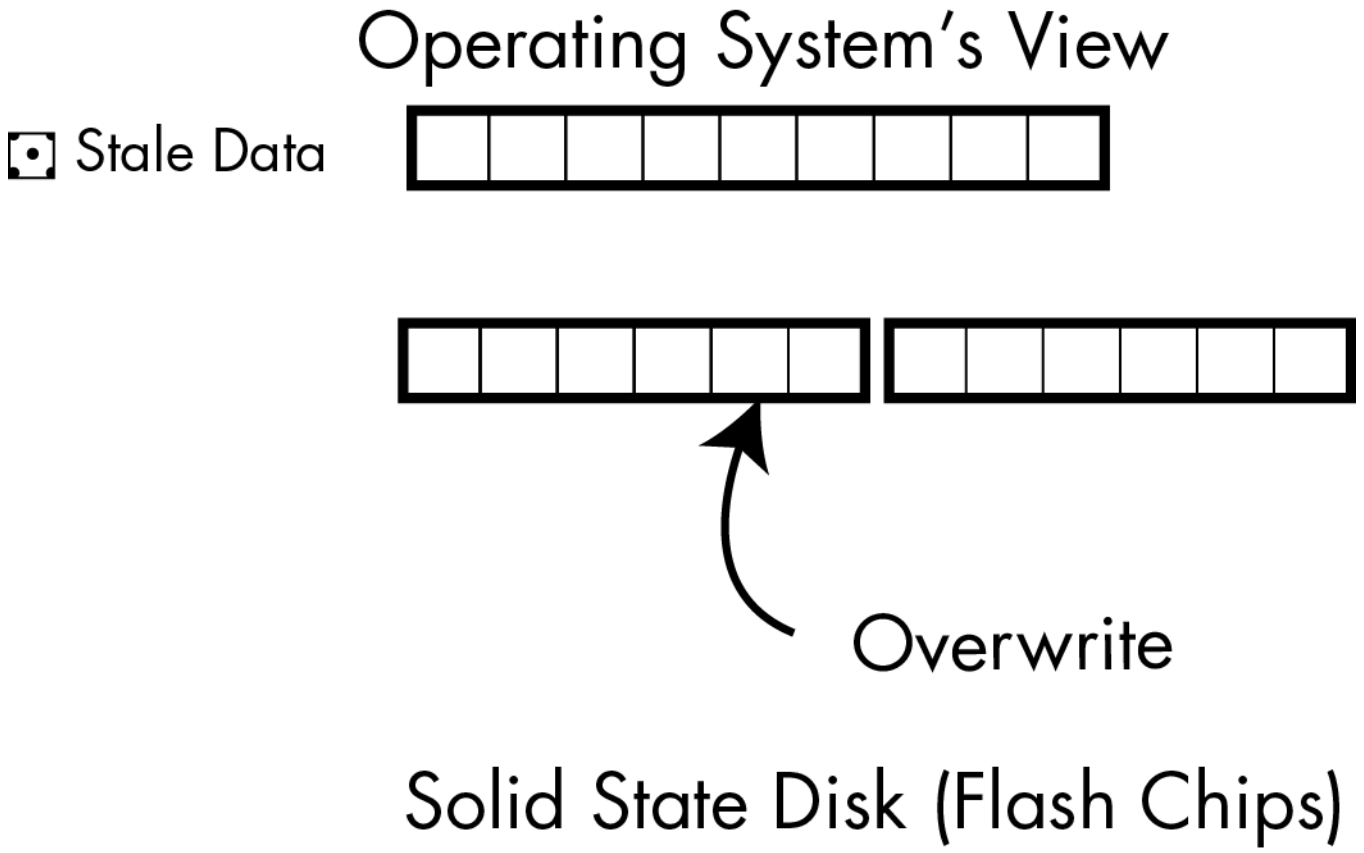
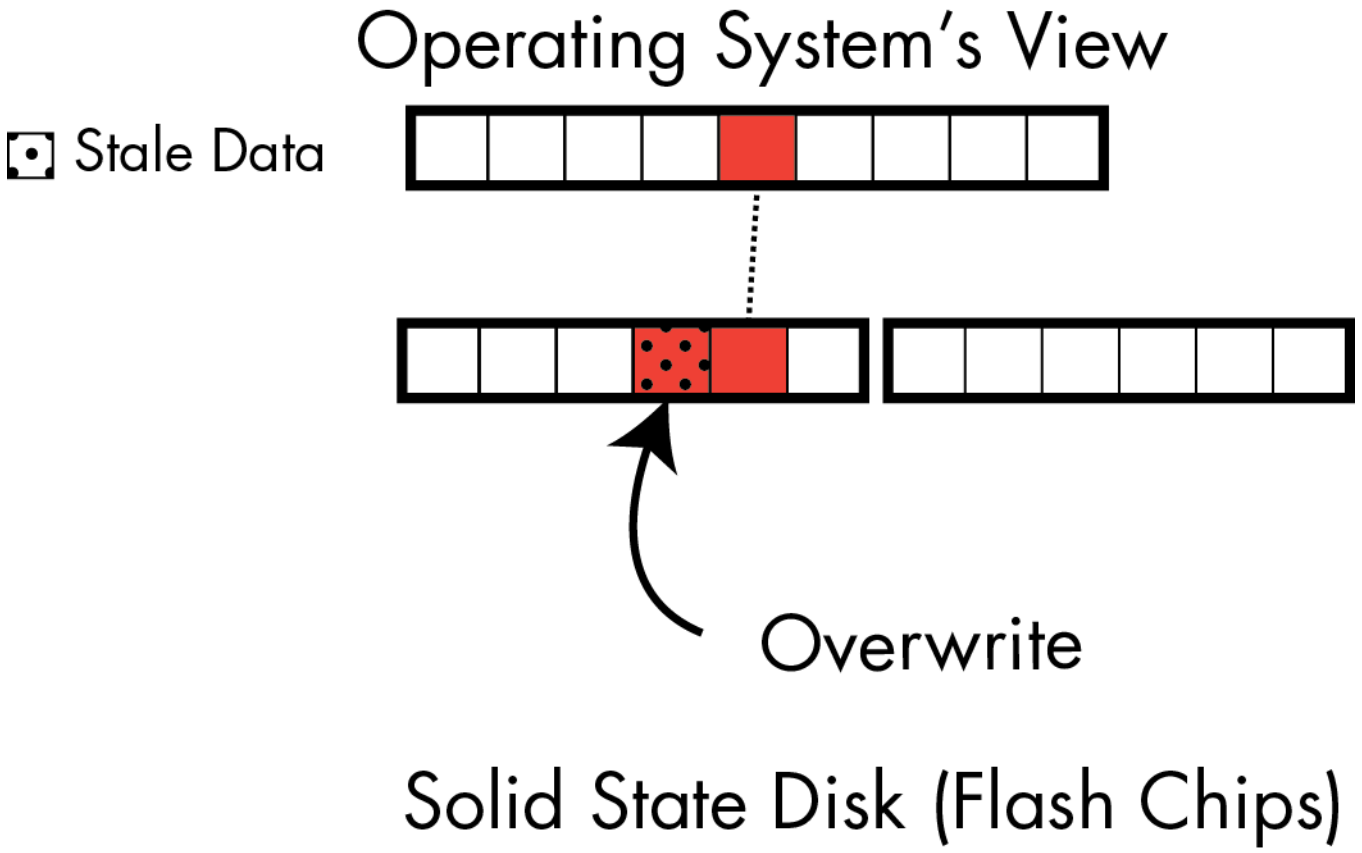
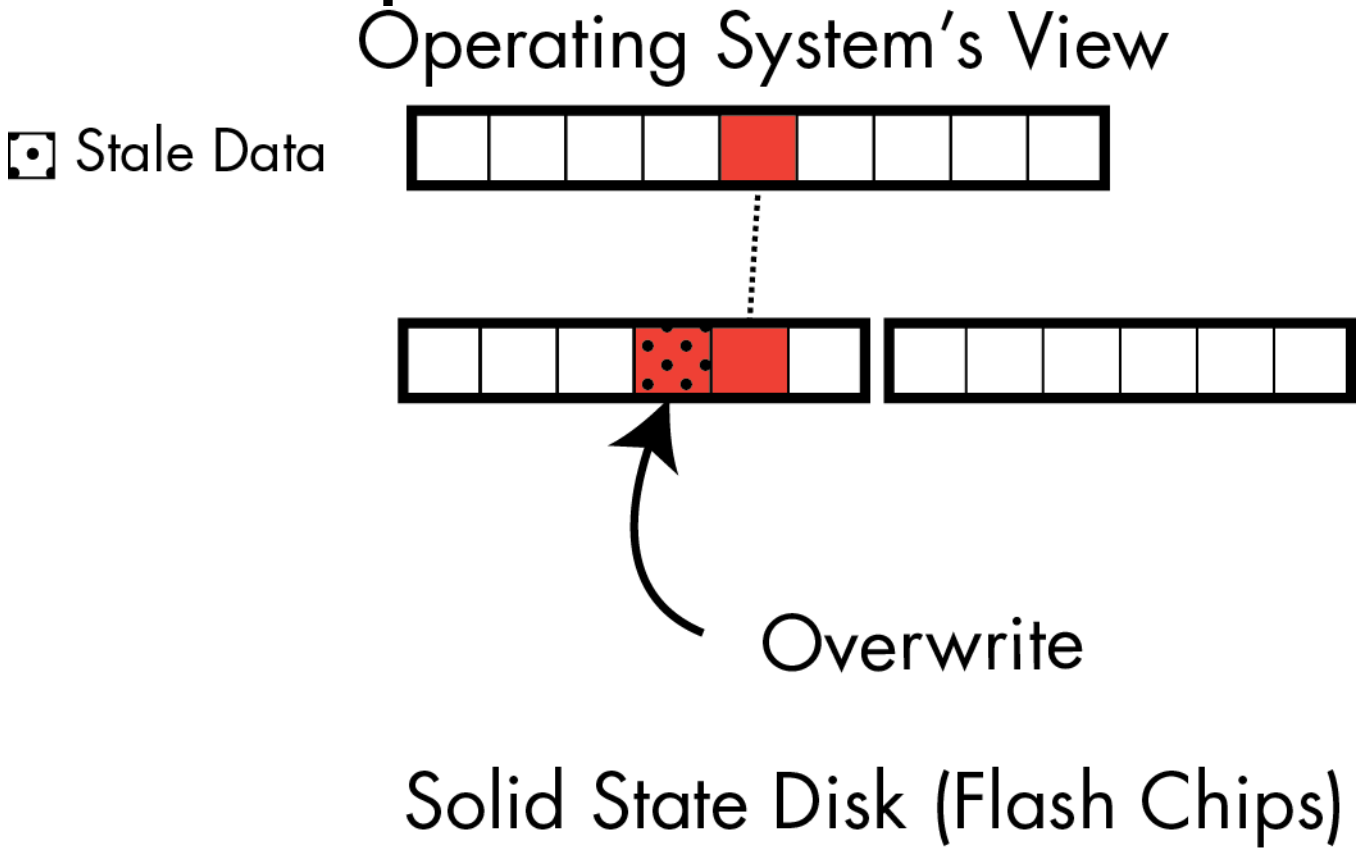


The datasheet says we have to program pages in order though…



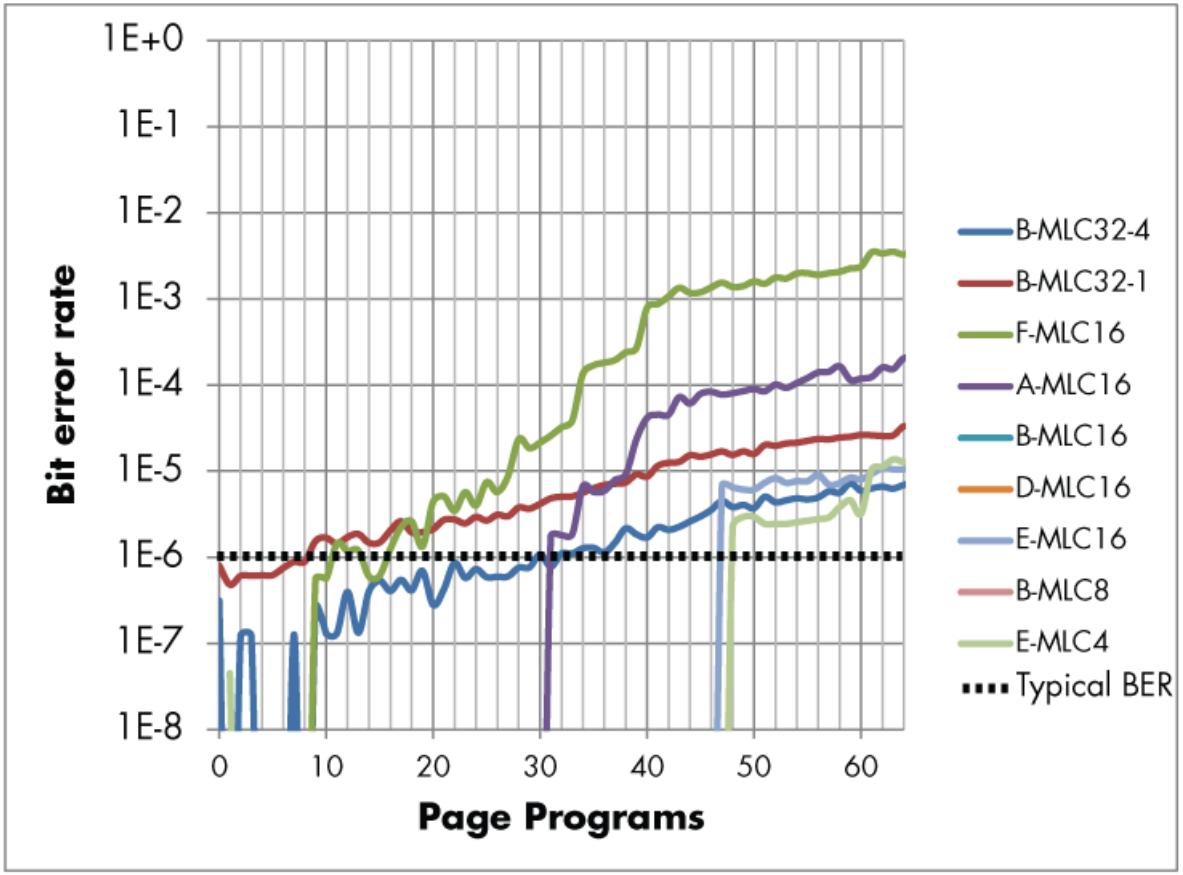
Our research has shown that it's okay, with specific restrictions.



We call this a "scrub".

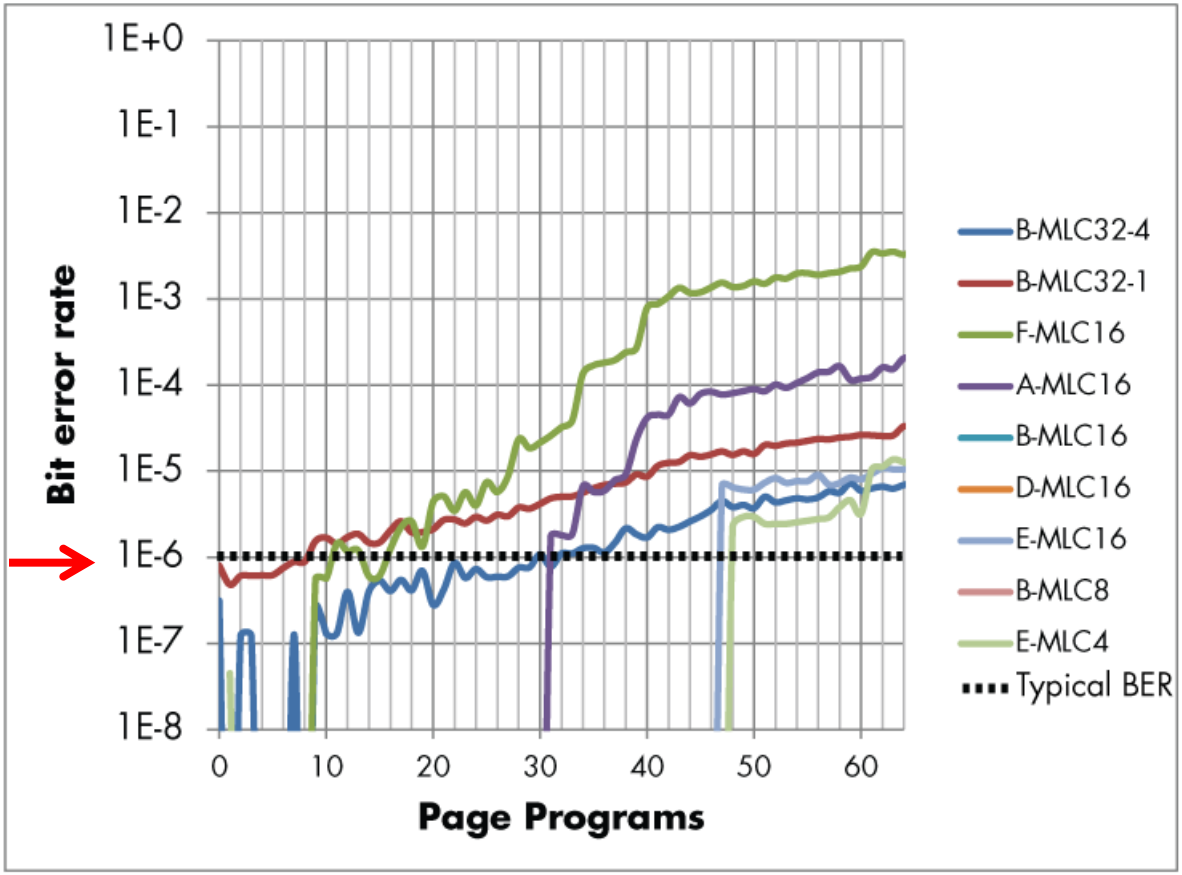
Low density, high reliability SLC memory: No caveat.

MLC:



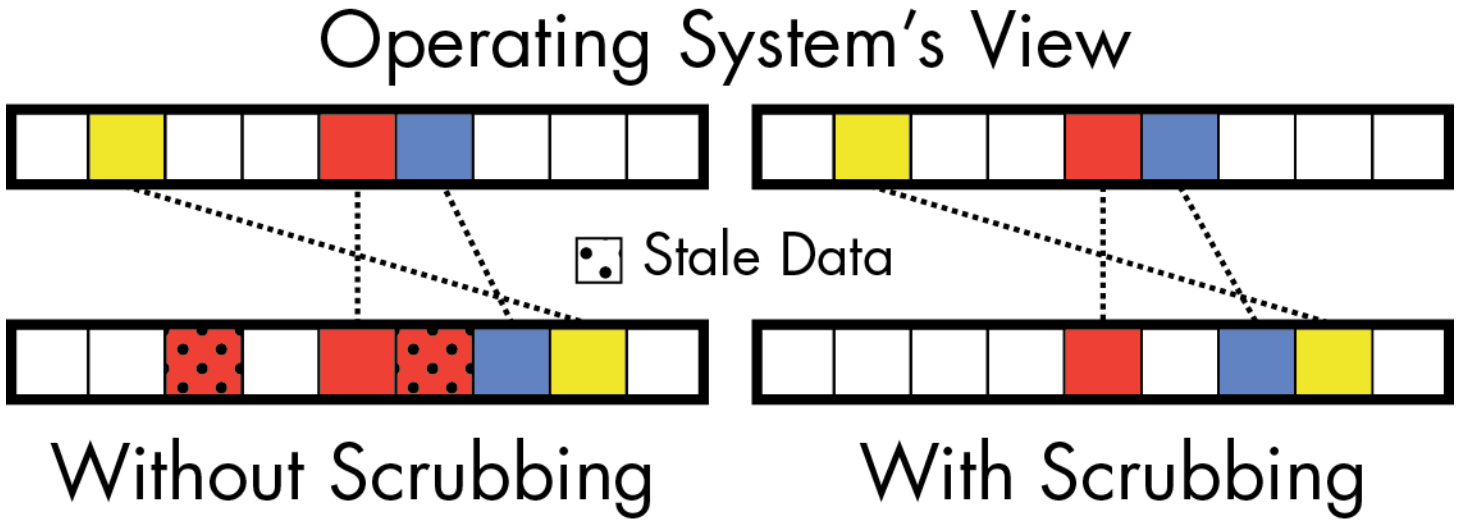
High Density MLC: We are limited by a "scrub budget"

Typical "Safe" BER



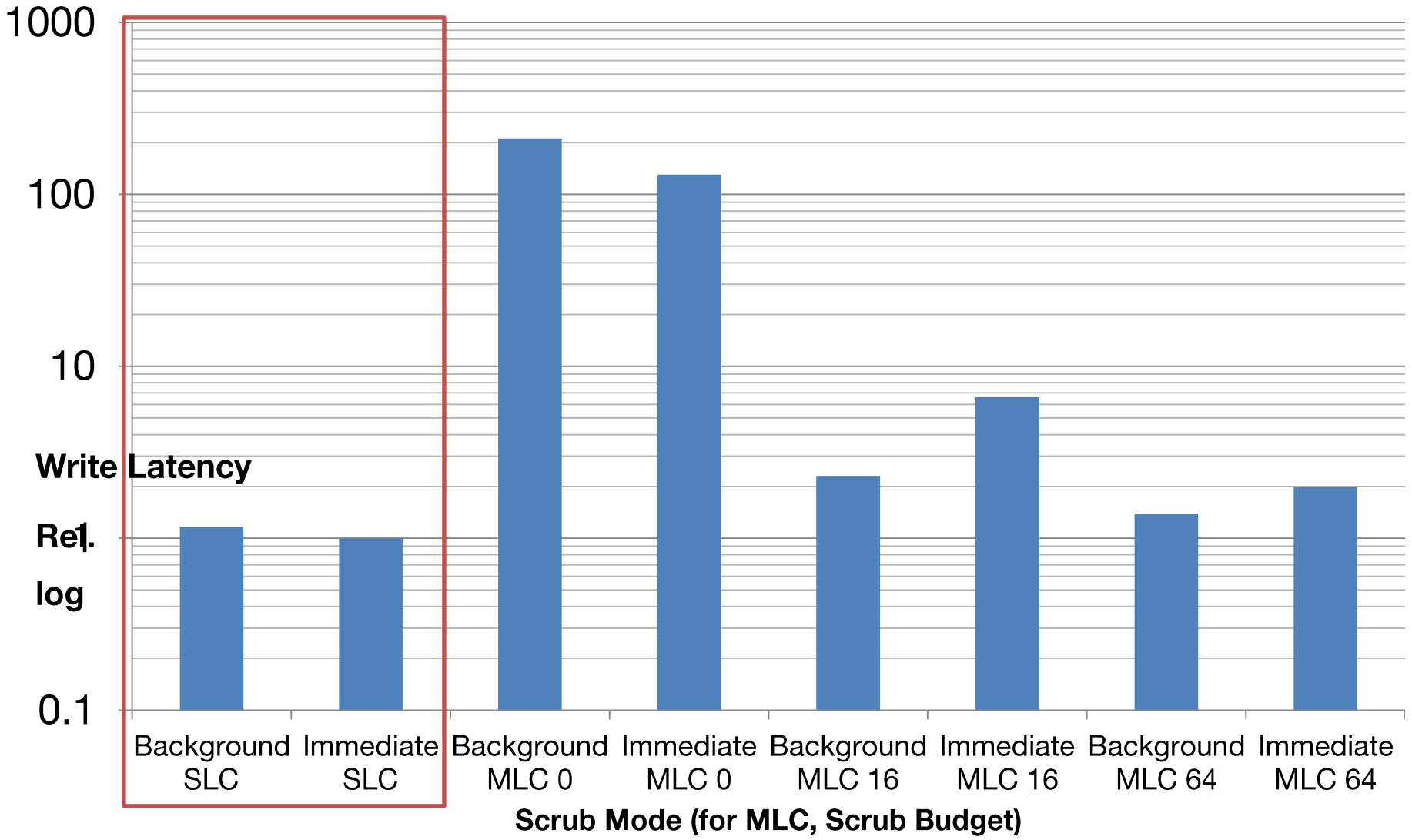
Sanitizing single files with scrub

- When do we do it?
  - *Immediate*: Right away
  - *Background:* When we're free
  - *Scan:* When we're told to

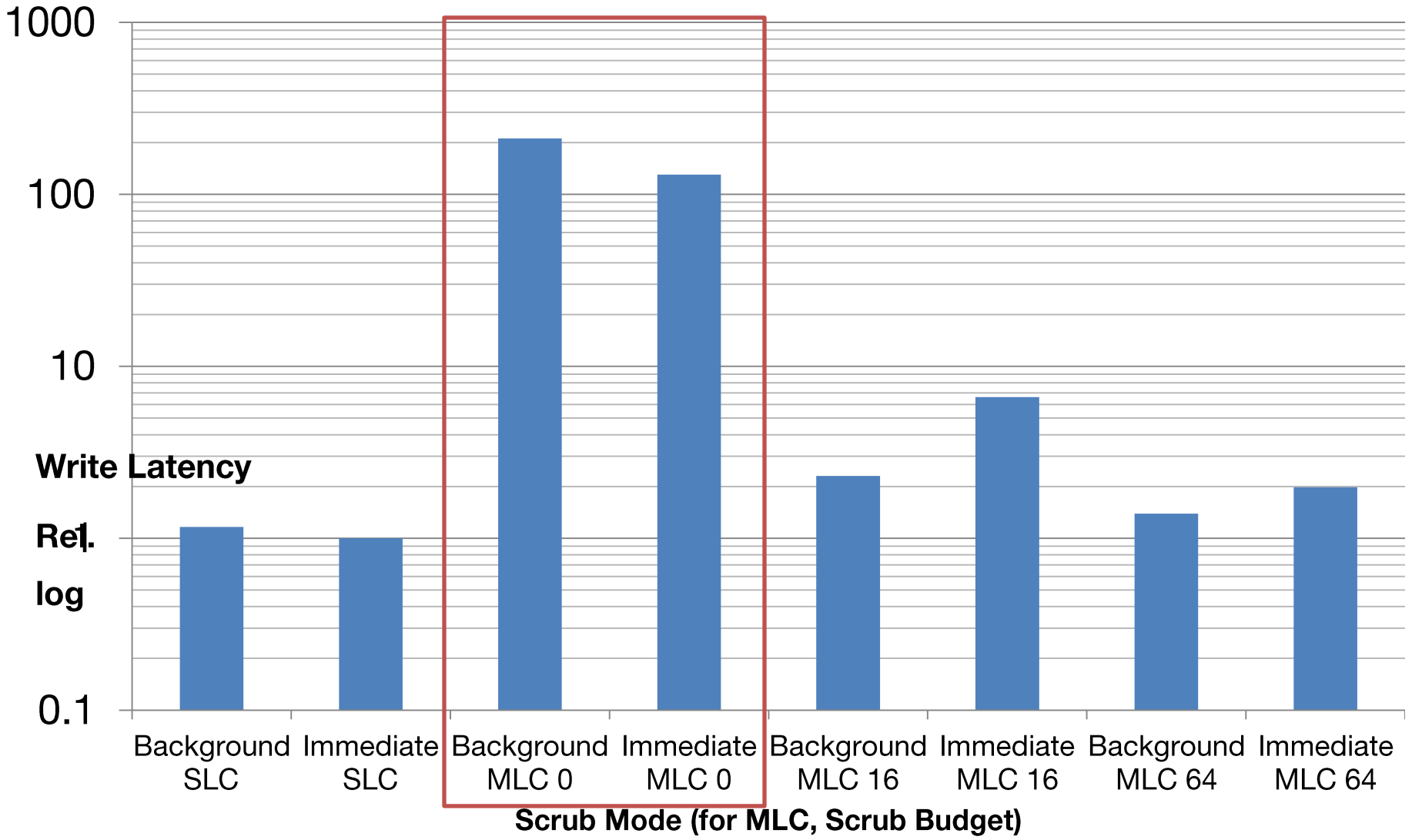


Immediate & Background

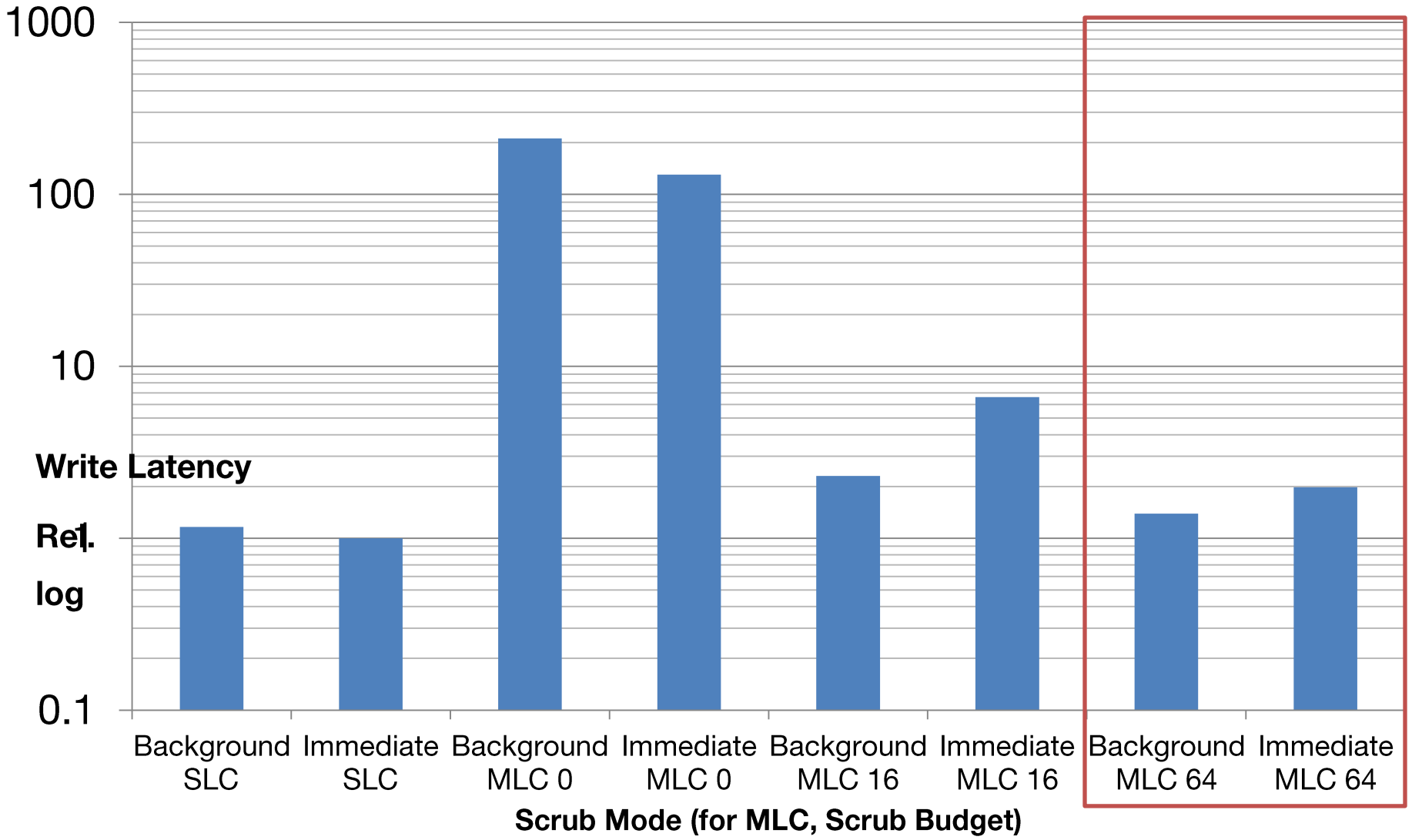
- Automatically scrubs stale data from SSD
- Immediate
  - Maximum Security
  - Writes don't complete until scrub is done
- Background
  - Good Security
  - Better performance, writes finish immediately



Harm. Mean of Financial, Software Devel., Patch, OLTP, Berkeley–DB, BTreeSwap

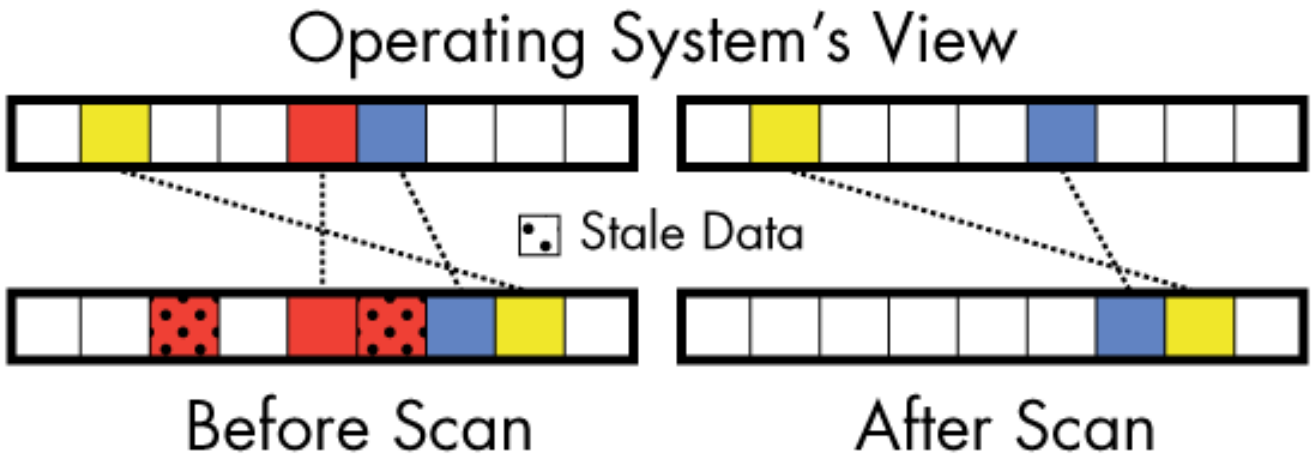


Harm. Mean of Financial, Software Devel., Patch, OLTP, Berkeley–DB, BTreeSwap

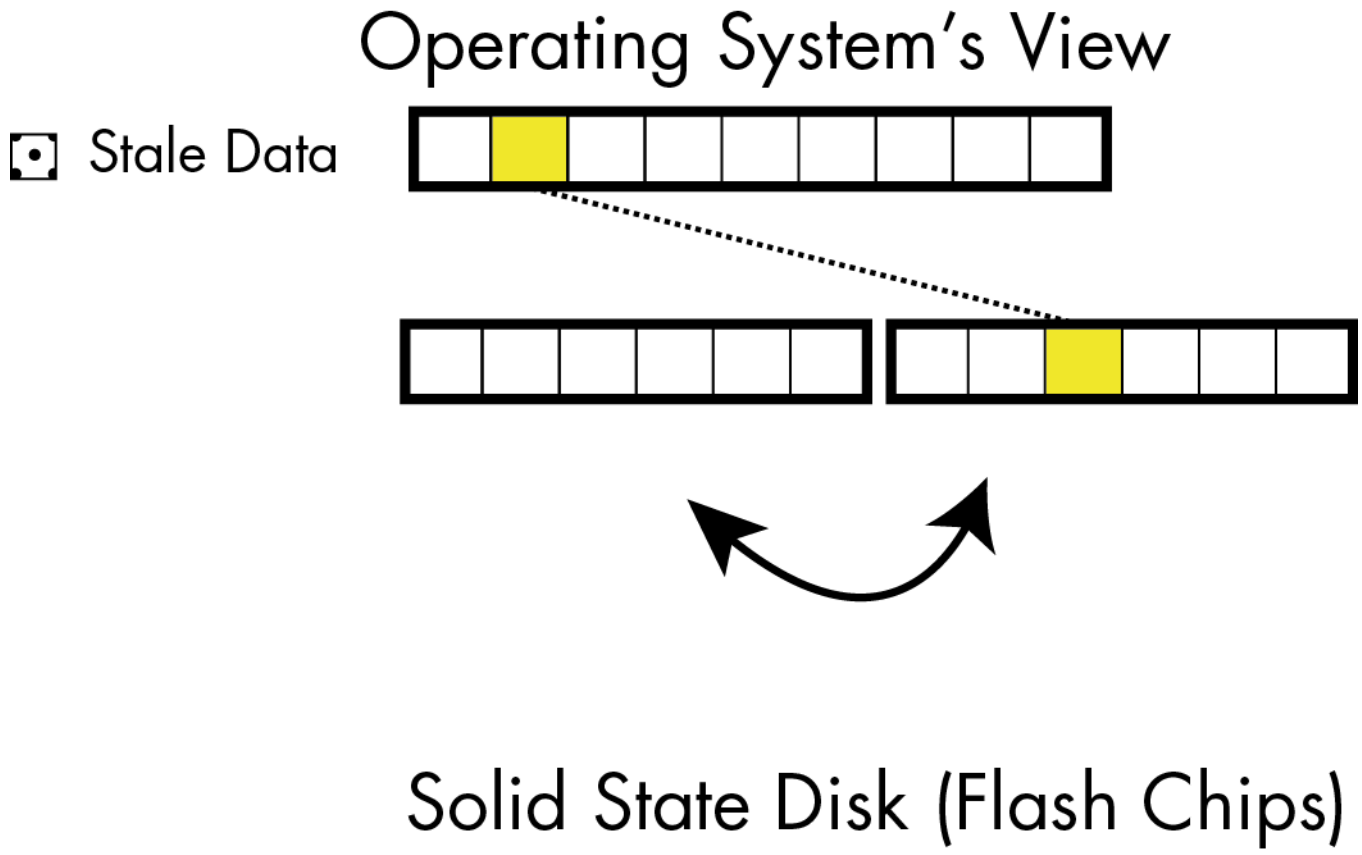


Harm. Mean of Financial, Software Devel., Patch, OLTP, Berkeley–DB, BTreeSwap

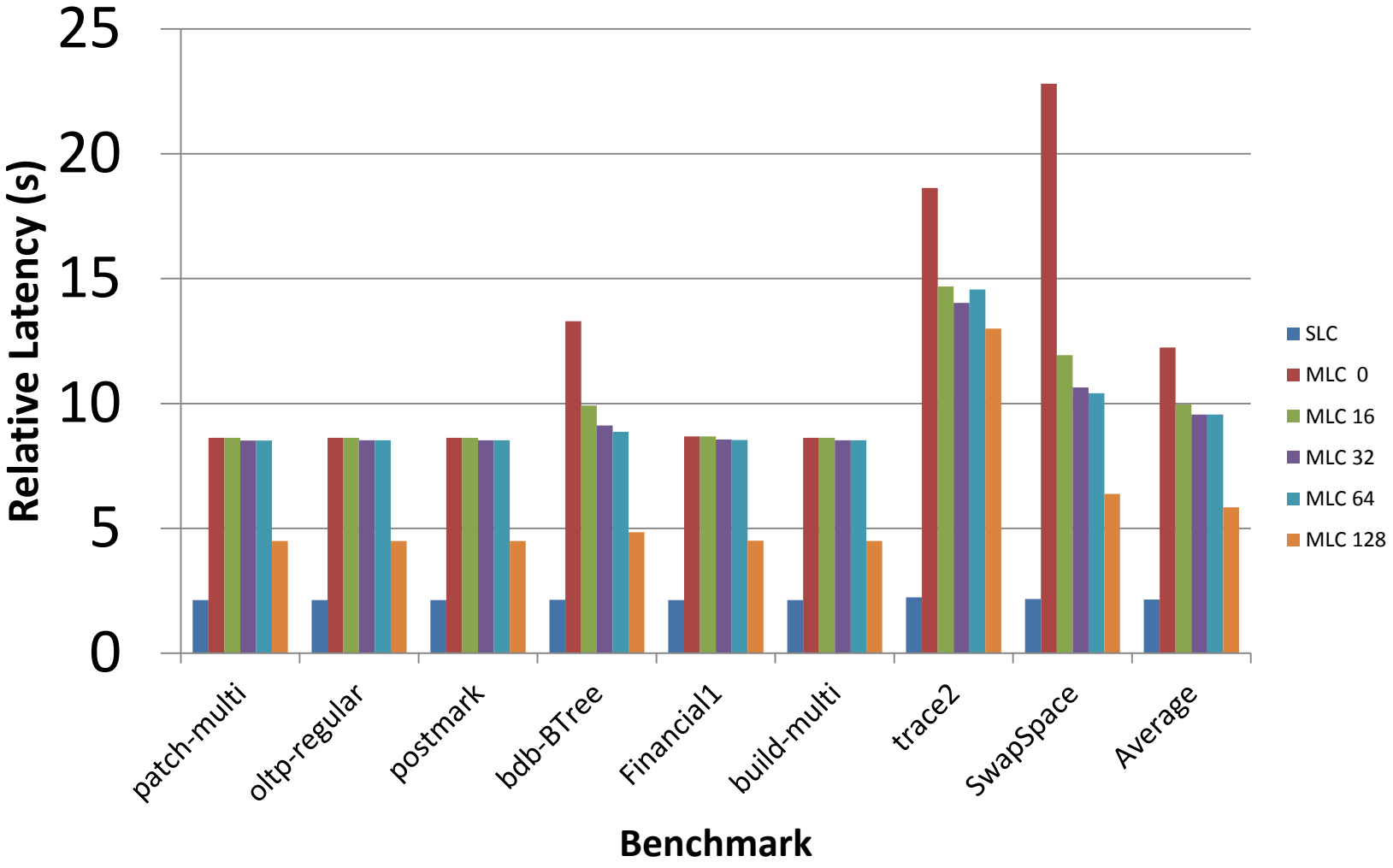
Scan is what we wanted earlier: A built-in command to sanitize individual files.



In MLC, we still have to manage the scrub budget with copies.



Scan Latency



Scrubbing

- The solution for single-file sanitization
- Sanitization level is selectable
- On-demand with scan mode

Conclusion

- Sanitizing storage media is essential for data security
- Need to verify sanitization effectiveness
  - Built-in mechanisms are reliable when implemented correctly
  - Hard-drive techniques don't necessarily work
- Sanitizing single files (in place) is difficult
  - Software overwrite cannot reliably sanitize
  - Scrubbing allows us to sanitize files by modifying the SSD