

JUNE 2022

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Protecting Vital Records



Vital records are those required for the continuation of a public agency's business operations, whilst sustaining its mandate. It includes information and data which are absolutely essential for the uninterrupted functioning of government services. All public agencies have a responsibility for the management of vital records for business continuity purposes before, during and after disasters, as those records are needed to safeguard the legal and financial rights of the Government and persons impacted by Government activities. Agencies should identify, protect, and have easily accessible records, data, and information systems that support the execution of their essential functions, including those critical to preserving the rights and interests of its clients.

A disaster is an unexpected occurrence inflicting widespread destruction which could have long term adverse effects on agency operations. This can include hurricanes, earthquakes, floods and fires. Agencies must assess the actual risk posed and design their vital records protection accordingly.

Only a small proportion of an agency's records are vital records; 3%-10% percent of the total records is the general rule. The selection of vital records must be based on criteria established by senior management and also on comprehensive knowledge of all agency records, available through current records surveys, file plans and approved disposal schedules.

Of greatest concern are vital records that are genuinely unique, of which there are no copies. Plans for the protection of these records may have to include relocation for appropriate safeguarding. Note that the National Archive no longer has space available to store vital records, and agencies should plan for this contingency in their Continuity of Operations Plans (CoOP). However copies may be duplicated and/or stored elsewhere, e.g. paper copies scanned into electronic recordkeeping systems, network drives, CLOUD service providers and/or external hard drives.

Electronic records are also subject to damage similar to paper records, plus loss through exposure to magnetic and electronic sources. These records can also be altered or corrupted, whether inadvertent and intentional, thereby rendering them incomplete or inaccessible. Agency's should contact Computer Services Department (CCSD) or their IT provider for technical assistance on protecting their electronic records.

Identifying Vital Records

Agencies should start by identifying the records they hold and address the type and nature of what would constitute as a likely disaster to their business operations. The next step is to define the most critical programs and activities and in so doing, determine which records are vital to ensuring the continuing functioning of those services; see examples listed below.

One should also consider if there is any duplication of the vital records identified and whether the copies are stored in a secure location. Additionally, the medium of records will have to be taken into account when planning protection and recovery measures.

EXAMPLES OF VITAL RECORDS				
Proof of ownership - property and equipment inventories	Fiscal obligations - accounts payable and receivable, contracts, leases, insurance policies and claims.	Employee - payroll and leave registers, staff personal files, health insurance and pension benefits.	Operational policies, etc. - orders of succession, delegations of authority, staffing assignments, policies/procedures/manuals/directives	Future direction - strategic plans, forecasts
Overall management - Board and executive meetings, reports and official statements	Records management - location and inventory lists; file plans and disposal schedules	Emergency procedures - Continuity of Operations Plans (CoOP)	Legal records - protection of resident's rights, ongoing litigation, and investigations	

Legislative Compliance

Under section 6(2) of the *National Archive and Public Records Act (2015 Revision)*, the most senior officer in public agencies is required to ensure records are maintained in good order and condition. Additionally, the National Archive's *Creation and Maintenance Standard (S1)* sets out the minimum recordkeeping measures. The quick self-assessment tool below should help agencies evaluate themselves against the preservation metrics listed in the *Standard*. In undertaking this assessment, it is best to be as candid as possible in order to identify any deficiencies, and then work on increasing compliance, as and if necessary. Should agencies have any concerns or questions they can contact the National Archive at cina@gov.ky.



S1 section	Requirements S1	Questions	Response	Suggested Remedial Response
7	<u>Temperature, RH and Light:</u> Records can deteriorate if exposed to too much light, particularly sunlight. They should be stored in stable environmental conditions; temp 60° – 80° F and RH 30 – 60%.	Are records subjected to direct sunlight? Are temperatures and relative humidity within acceptable ranges?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A ☐ Unsure	• Move records away from direct sunlight. • Check and maintain air-conditioning systems. • Consider using a humidifier.
8(2)	<u>Pests – insects and vermin:</u> Silverfish and mice can do considerable damage; infestation may spread when records are moved around.	Are there signs of rodents, silverfish or other pests?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A ☐ Unsure	• Regular inspection of records for signs of deterioration/degradation from pest and mould must be carried out.
8(2)	<u>Mould:</u> Mould will usually affect areas with high humidity and/or without air circulation. Mould is a health risk for staff and can damage records.	Is the location damp or mouldy? Is there growth on papers?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A ☐ Unsure	• If mould is identified in your storage area, move unaffected records to a new location. • If records are already affected by mould, contact the Department of Environmental Health for an assessment, and the National Archive for further advice.
8	<u>Storage:</u> Storing records on the floor puts them at risk of flooding or water build-up. It is also a safety issue for staff.	Are records stored on the floor?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A ☐ Unsure	• Use storage cabinets and/or shelving units. • Standards for records storage recommend a height of 4 inches off the floor. • Do not stack more than 4 boxes on each other as the lower ones may crush under the heavy weight.
7(5) 8	<u>Security of the location:</u> Records should not be kept in areas that are accessible by unauthorised persons.	Is the location accessible by unauthorised persons, and is it protected from potential theft?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A ☐ Unsure	• Identify who has access to your storage areas, ensuring the areas are properly secured and monitored. • Limit access to storerooms to authorised staff only, or, if not possible, keep records in locked cabinets.
8	<u>Fire and water:</u> Storage facilities are to be protected from fire and water hazards.	Are records near water pipes, sinks, toilets; are there any signs of leaks? Are records near electrical outlets?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A ☐ Unsure	• Consider relocating records. • Repair or discontinue use of electrical outlets. • Install smoke/fire detection systems, including fire extinguishers. • Inspect storage areas regularly.
7(3) 8(1)	<u>Dedicated record storage areas:</u> Eating, drinking, and smoking must not be permitted in storage areas.	Is there evidence of eating and drinking in record storage areas?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A ☐ Unsure	• Clean area and ensure that all staff are aware that no food or drinks should be consumed or even stored in these areas.

Checklist for the Continuity of Operations



- ☐ Risk assessment - Identify potential risks and their effect on records and information management systems, and then outline selected mitigation steps and monitoring processes.
 - If a disaster occurred, how long could the agency function with available staff until records and recordkeeping systems are back online?
- ☐ Pre-disaster planning – In your CoOP, outline the duties/tasks of those responsible for records disaster mitigation and have specific recovery/remediation procedures for dealing with the identified disasters.
 - Has adequate storage and security of the records been identified?
- ☐ Communication - Identify who should be informed in the event of a records disaster and how information will be exchanged. Include instructions on the means of interacting with your stakeholders (e.g. staff, clients and vendors).
 - Has your agency's team been briefed? Plan the recovery approach and assign tasks.
- ☐ Disaster co-ordination - Compile a contact list of external emergency service agencies including the National Archive, the Department of Environmental Health, NEOC, and Hazard Management Cayman Islands.
 - Identify the external services/vendors required for normal business operations.
- ☐ Disaster response - Activate the plan, with priority given to the recovery of vital records and critical data (including lists of records and their locations). Procedures should be in place for handling damaged materials, including the required resources (e.g. staff, alternate locations, equipment, etc.).
 - Secure affected areas and assess any damage to records, particularly vital records. Endeavour to collect evidence of damage as quickly as possible with photos and/or written notes/reports. Submit all documentation, along with a *Damaged Physical Records Notification Form* to the National Archive.
- ☐ Recovery - Undertake and coordinate the activities for record recovery/remediation, and establish procedures for handling records after a disaster.
 - Do not dispose of damaged records as they may be salvageable; consult with the National Archive. *Note: no public records can be destroyed without an approved disposal schedule and in accordance with the National Archive's documented destruction process.*
- ☐ Post recovery - Review and update the plan.
 - What worked and what can be improved.





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