United States Department of Agriculture
Research, Education, and Economics

ARS CSREES ERS NASS

Manual

Title: Records Management

Number: 251.8M

Date: October 15, 2006

Originating Office: Office of the Chief Information Officer, Agricultural Research Service

This Replaces: 251.8M dated 09/22/05

Distribution: REE Offices in Headquarters, Areas and Field Locations

This Manual supplements P&P 251.8 in establishing REE policies and procedures for the creation, maintenance, and disposition of records. Refer to your agency's records schedules or the General Records Schedules for records dispositions or contact the Records Management Officer.

The Manual has been updated to reflect current NARA guidance on the management of short term temporary records, including email.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

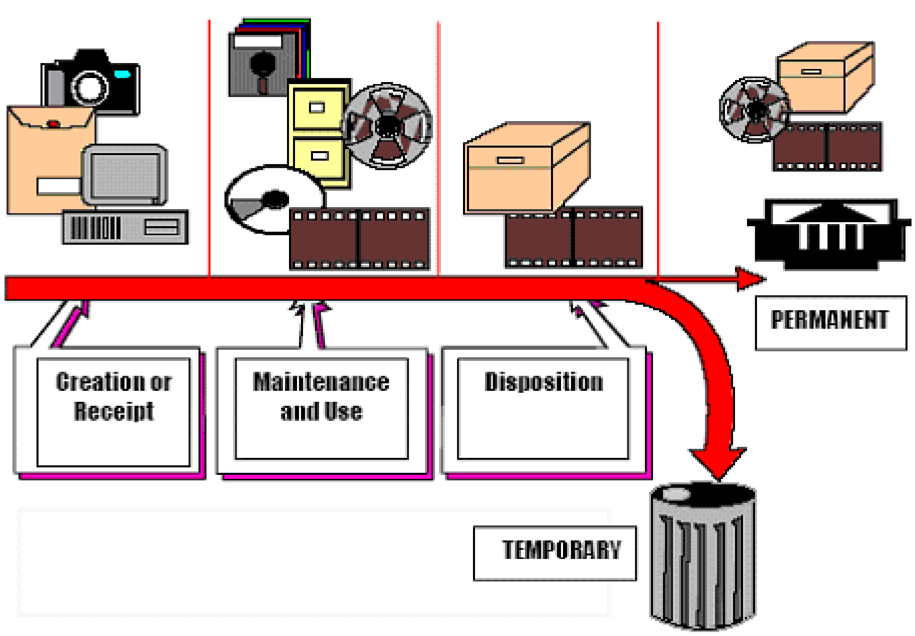
Every day REE agencies staff conduct research and other business that affect all Americans and in doing so record and keep information about their actions. This manual is designed to provide agency staff with the information and tools necessary to ensure that full and accurate records are created and managed to support the American Government and the interests of its citizens.

A properly implemented records management program will ensure that information is available when and where it is needed, in an organized and efficient manner. Records management encompasses all the recordkeeping requirements that allow an organization to establish and maintain control over information flow and administrative operations so that the agencies can remain accountable to the public and agency staff can make timely and informed decisions. The main objectives of a records management program are to:

- Manage records in every media to ensure proper preservation and ready access throughout their lifecycle.
- Promptly destroy eligible temporary records with expired retention periods (assuring they are not subject to audit, investigation, or litigation).
- Systematically transfer and economically store records when they are no longer needed to conduct agency business but are not yet eligible for destruction.
- Transfer permanent records to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) for preservation, reference, and research use.

To be effective, a records management program must apply appropriate controls to records during each of the five major stages of the information life cycle:[1]

Exhibit 2.0. Records Life Cycle



- The creation stage, when information and records are produced in a wide variety of forms and formats using different equipment and technologies.
- The distribution and use stage, when information and records are transmitted to those who need them and, upon receipt, are used to conduct business.
- The storage and maintenance stage, when information and records are filed or stored according to a logical scheme to permit subsequent retrieval, are housed in some type of storage device, and are protected and maintained to safeguard the integrity of the information. During this stage, the information is active; it is frequently referred to and is thus usually stored close to its users.
- The retention and disposition stage, when information and records decline in value, become inactive, and are then removed from active storage in prime office space, are destroyed immediately if they have no further value, or are transferred to an inactive storage facility for the duration of their retention life.
- The archival preservation stage, when the few records that never lose their value are preserved permanently in archives for ongoing historical reference or research purposes.

Records management provides practical tools and techniques to manage all records through the entirety of their life cycle in an efficient, cost-effective manner.

Every REE agency employee is responsible for managing agency records. Anyone who creates a document using a word processing application, enters information into a database, files a document in a folder, records observations in a lab notebook, or does anything else that fulfills an agency function is a records custodian, and is responsible for ensuring the safety, timely availability, and proper disposition of the records in their custody.

This records management manual provides specific, step-by-step instructions and guidance in helping agency staff manage the records in their care and fulfill their recordkeeping responsibilities to:

- Create the records necessary to document the activities for which they are responsible.
- File those records in a manner that ensures their safety and efficient retrieval when they are needed.
- Dispose of records in accordance with Federal regulations, Departmental directives, and REE policies.

---

2. What Are Records/Nonrecords?

The Legal Definition

Records are defined as follows:

> …all books, papers, maps, photographs, machine readable materials, or other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received by an agency of the United States Government under Federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business and preserved or appropriate for preservation by that agency or its legitimate successor as evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions,

> procedures, operations, or other activities of the Government or because of the informational value of data in them. Library and museum material made or acquired and preserved solely for reference or exhibition purposes, extra copies of documents preserved only for convenience of reference, and stocks of publications and of processed documents are not included. . . (44 U.S.C. 3301)

In summary, records consist of everything that documents the business of your office, no matter what medium is used to record such information, including paper, photographs, sound recordings, microfilm, maps, as well as email and other electronic records. If materials document agency business, they are considered to be records, and their disposition can be determined by referring to the General Records Schedules (GRS) which can be found on the NARA website, or by referring to the agency records schedules located on the REE Records Management webpage, or by consulting your agency Records Management Officer (RMO).

General Guidance

Only the Archivist of the United States has the authority to approve the disposition of Federal records. The Archivist grants permission in two ways:

- Through the GRS which are developed by NARA and which provide disposition instructions for many administrative records that are common to most Federal agencies.
- Through agency-specific records retention and disposition schedules.

Agency records schedules are developed by agencies with approval from NARA and, on occasion, the General Accounting Office (GAO). Records retention and disposition schedules describe records at the series level and provide instructions on how long to keep them, and what to do with them when they are no longer needed to conduct agency business. For detailed instructions on how to perform various records management functions, refer to the NARA publication, *Disposition of Federal Records*, located on the NARA webpage.

Permanent Records

Permanent records are those appraised by NARA as having sufficient historical or other value to justify their continued preservation after they have served the agency's needs for administrative, legal, or fiscal purposes. NARA estimates that only about 2 percent of all Federal records are permanent. It is therefore critical that agency permanent records be identified on records schedules and that employees be trained to properly maintain them and ultimately transfer them to NARA. Permanent records should be stored in file folders that are clearly marked “PERMANENT” and should not be mixed with temporary records. Please contact your agency RMO for assistance when it is time to transfer permanent records out of your office space.

Temporary Records

Temporary records are records that NARA has approved for disposal, namely destruction or donation, either immediately or after a specified time. Retention periods for temporary program records are specified in the agency records schedules. All records contained in NARA’s GRS guidelines are temporary.

Personal Papers

Personal papers (see the USDA Records Management Departmental Directive, Appendix C Section 2a, at http://www.ocio.usda.gov/records/doc/DR3080-001.htm and "Documenting Your Public Service" available on the National Archives' website at http://www.archives.gov/records_management/policy_and_guidance/documenting_your_public_service.html) are documentary materials belonging to an individual that do not document agency business. They are related solely to an individual employee's affairs or are used exclusively for that individual's convenience.

Personal papers generally include the following categories of material:

- Papers created before entering Government service, including previous work files, political materials, and reference files.
- Private materials brought into, created, or received in the office that relate solely to an individual's personal affairs such as outside business pursuits, professional affiliations, private political associations, or family and private affairs. They also include personal copies of personnel records such as copies of forms relating to official actions, time and attendance, training, and so on.
- Work-related personal papers that are not used in the transaction of Government business such as diaries, journals, notes, personal calendars, and appointment schedules that are not prepared or received in the process of transacting Government business.

Private materials not created within the agency but brought into it by an employee for reference purposes do not become agency records by mere incidence of location. However, recent court rulings have considered several basic principles in determining the applicability of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). These principles include: creation, content, purpose, distribution, use, maintenance, disposition, control, segregation, and revision. Please keep these principles in mind when determining whether particular documents should be regarded as personal. For further information, refer to P&P 158.1, "Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act Guidelines" or contact your agency Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) or Privacy Act (PA) Officer for guidance.

Nonrecord Materials

Nonrecord materials do not document agency activities and are only used for reference or convenience. REE agency employees are required to manage nonrecord as well as record material. Nonrecord materials include:

- Extra copies of documents maintained solely for convenience of reference.
- Information copies of correspondence, directives, forms, and other documents which require no action by the office receiving them.
- Routing slips and transmittal sheets adding no information to the transmitted material.
- Tickler, follow up, or suspense copies of correspondence (provided they are extra copies of the originals).
- Draft copies of documents prior to circulation.
- Duplicate copies of documents maintained in the same file.

- Extra copies of printed or processed materials for which complete record sets exist, such as current and superseded manuals maintained outside the office responsible for maintaining the record set.
- Catalogs, trade journals, and other publications that are received from other Government agencies, commercial firms, or private institutions that require no action and are not part of a case on which action is taken.
- Physical exhibits, artifacts, and other materials which do not have evidential value.

Determining whether a particular document, such as an electronic data file or an email message, is a record does not depend on whether it is an original or a copy. Several copies of a single form may each have record status because each serves a separate purpose in conducting agency business. Multiple copies of a single document generally are not all records, unless they have unique value based on their arrangement (according to a different filing scheme) or serve a separate purpose. For example, copies of central correspondence files may be filed both alphabetically by subject and chronologically by date. Similarly, most copies of agency publications are nonrecords; however, a single set of publications should be designated as the record copy and distinguished from other copies or stocks of the same publication.

Penalties for Unlawful Destruction of Federal Records

Both NARA and the agencies are responsible for preventing the unauthorized disposition of Federal records, including their unlawful or accidental destruction, defacement, alteration, or removal from Federal custody. Unauthorized disposition of Federal records (44 U.S.C. 3106) may lead to a $2,000 fine, a three year imprisonment, or both (18 U.S.C. 2071).

---

3. Care and Maintenance of Records

General Guidelines

All employees are responsible for properly applying the GRS and their agency's records schedules to the records that they create, receive, and maintain. Before applying the schedules for the first time, each office should match the schedule with the records actually maintained in the office and alert the RMO for your agency to the existence of any unscheduled records. Each office, working with the RMO, should also develop a file plan which contains the identifying number, title or description, and disposition authority of the files held in the office. For those agencies that have file plans, the office file plan should use the same format.

Unless the schedule specifies otherwise, disposition authorities apply retroactively to all existing records described in the schedule. In applying the schedule(s), employees should take the following actions:

- Remove and destroy unnecessary nonrecord materials such as extra copies, outdated manuals, or reference material.

- Cut off or break files as specified in the relevant records retention and disposition schedule. Records are usually cut off annually at the end of the fiscal, calendar, or leave year.
- Retire/transfer eligible records to a Federal Records Center (FRC).
- Promptly destroy temporary records when their retention periods expire. Under certain circumstances, temporary records may also be donated.
- Preserve permanent records until they are eligible for transfer to the National Archives or to a FRC.
- Notify the agency RMO immediately if you discover records that are not covered in the GRS or in your agency's records schedules.

Contract Records

Employees with procurement authority, including purchase card holders, are responsible for maintaining related records according to the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR); Part 4.805, "Storage, Handling, and Disposal of Contract Files" (see http://www.arnet.gov/far/loadmainre.html).

Personnel Records

For specific instructions on managing personnel records, such as the Official Personnel Folders (OPF) and Employee Medical Folders (EMF), employees should refer to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) "Guide to Personnel Recordkeeping" which is available on the OPM website.

Transferring Records to Other Agencies

NARA's written approval is required before transferring records to another executive agency. However, NARA's approval is not necessary when the transfer is required by statute, Executive Order, Presidential reorganization plan, treaty, or when the records are transferred to FRCs or the National Archives. It is also unnecessary when loaning the records for official use, or when the transfer is between two parts of the same executive department.

Donating Temporary Records

Agencies may donate temporary records eligible for disposal to an appropriate person or organization, but only after the agency has requested (in writing) and gained NARA's approval to do so. Coordinate donations with your agency RMO.

Special Types of Records

Employees are responsible for properly creating, maintaining, transferring or disposing of audiovisual, electronic, microform, cartographic, and remote sensing imagery, as well as architectural and engineering records, according to NARA regulations. As with all other records, these unusual records should be properly identified, indexed, migrated (in the case of electronic records), and stored to prevent any damage or premature destruction. If you are responsible for maintaining these types of records and are not sure under what conditions they should be maintained, contact your RMO.

4. Designating Official File Stations

What Are Official File Stations?

Official file stations are the location(s) in the agency where the record copies of files are maintained. To ensure that records are not scattered throughout an organization, it is essential that program managers (PMs) designate official file stations. Generally, one central file location per branch is adequate. In determining the file station location, PMs should consider who will be using the records, how frequently, and for what purpose. The file station must be properly maintained and material must be promptly and accurately filed. Managing official files effectively will:

- Build management confidence in the program staff's ability to responsibly conduct official business.
- Ensure adequate and proper documentation, rapid retrieval of complete records, and efficient use of personnel, space, and equipment.
- Enable compliance with Federal regulations, including FOIA and PA.
- Prevent unnecessary duplication and growth of files in other locations.
- Facilitate retirement or destruction of records no longer needed for the conduct of business.

Duplicate File Stations

If an official file station is not readily available to frequent users, a duplicate set of some files may be made available at another location. However, authorized duplicate files must not disrupt the operation of the official file station. If information becomes split between the two files, neither will tell the complete story. It is also important to keep duplicate copies to a minimum.

Notifying the RMO of Official File Station(s)

Inform the RMO of the location of the official file station. Reviews will be conducted to ensure compliance.

5. Filing Practices

Good filing practices enable users to retrieve records quickly while they are in office space and to efficiently dispose of them when it is time to remove them from the office.

Document Placement

Place documents in the folder with the latest dated material on top and with the top of the sheet toward the left of a lateral file drawer as the reader faces it, or toward the front of a vertical drawer so that all filed documents can be read as a book.

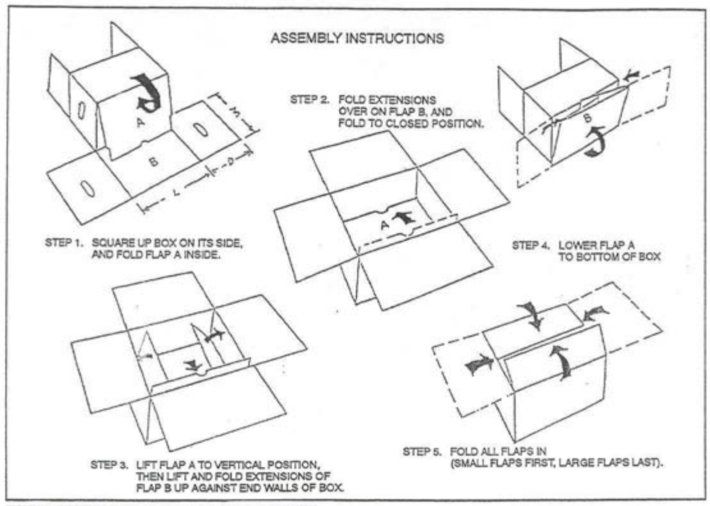


FIGURE 3 RECORDS CENTER BOX ASSEMBLY INSTRUCTIONS

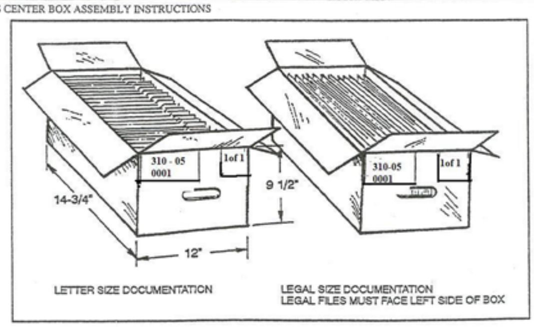


FIGURE 4 FILE PLACEMENT IN BOX AND LOCATION OF BOX IDENTIFICATION

Fastening Material

In general, do not fasten papers to the folder. Prong fasteners more than double the time required to place papers in the file. If materials must be fastened in certain files, use folders with integral prong fasteners, which are generally easier and quicker to use.

Cutting off Files

Files cutoff is the termination or breaking of files at regular intervals to control volume and facilitate retrieval. Cutting off files also makes it possible to retire inactive records in complete sets and to retire or transfer records in blocks. For example, 2000-2005 is a five year block. Under this process, a file series is regularly cut off at the end of a specific time or an event and a new file is established. Most files are generally cut off at the end of a fiscal year (September 30) or calendar year but they can be broken more often, if the volume of the records is large. When a standard file folder is about 3/4" thick and cannot be subdivided further, you should number the folder on the folder label as Folder 1. Then place an identically labeled folder in the file immediately in front of the cutoff folder, and label it Folder 2. The new folder should begin at a logical time, such as at the beginning of a month or a fiscal year.

Screening Files

Commonly called purging or weeding, screening files is the process of reviewing the materials within each folder to remove all nonrecord or nonessential items. This is a very time-consuming practice which could be avoided if all professionals and supervisors make it part of their daily routine to identify and segregate marginally valuable documents which can be filed separately with other nonrecords. However, consideration must be given to related storage costs, and those who perform the screening must proceed carefully and with due deliberation in order to avoid inadvertently discarding important records. It is best to file only what is needed in a folder in the first place to avoid unnecessary screening.

Separating Active from Inactive Records

At the end of each calendar or fiscal year, review the cutoff and disposition instructions in the records schedule, and remove folders which are not consulted at least once a month. Place these folders in the inactive file space or, if they are eligible, retire them to the FRC. Replace the folders with current folders as appropriate. Since active files are referred to more often than inactive, it is generally best to file active records in the top three drawers of a file cabinet. Inactive records should be filed in the bottom drawers. Both types of file drawers should be clearly labeled "ACTIVE" or "INACTIVE" depending on their contents.

For advice on setting up filing systems, see the File Systems section on the REE Records Management website.

Useful Filing Techniques

The following techniques are recommended in filing hard copy documents:

- File documents routinely, daily, if possible, so that records are in their proper place and accessible to all.
- Include a copy of the file plan and/or folder title list in the front of each drawer to facilitate access.
- Clearly label drawers and folders so that others can quickly determine the contents.
- Remove all paper clips, pins, and rubber bands.
- Do not file envelopes with incoming correspondence. Discard them unless they contain important information not available on the document.
- File by subject, if the agency file plan does not provide for file codes.
- Do not overstuff folders and filing cabinets.
- Try not to file nonrecord material in the same folder with record material.
- Place records with the same disposition together in the folder.
- Use subject dividers to segregate large series.
- Use charge-out cards so that borrowed records can be tracked.
- Purge or weed nonrecord material and other documents that can be discarded on a regular basis, at least once a year.

6. Electronic Records

An ever increasing percentage of agency records is created and stored electronically. Unfortunately, most Federal agencies do not have current records management guidance in place addressing the unique retention and disposition issues relating to electronic records.

In fact, the management of electronic records is still in its infancy, and guidance from NARA on this topic has been confused by several court rulings. In 1997, a Federal District Court ruled that portions of GRS 20, which provides for the disposition of electronic records maintained by most Government offices, were null and void. This ruling would have required agencies to preserve all electronic records in their original format until individual dispositions and retentions were approved by NARA. However, on August 6, 1999, the U.S. Court of Appeals reversed the lower court ruling (Public Citizen vs. John Carlin, Archivist of the U.S., et al.). The National Archives was then allowed to reinstate GRS 20, which allows agency employees to destroy the electronic version of a record if it is first printed and filed in a manual filing system, saved by conversion to microfilm, or transferred to an electronic recordkeeping system. Because neither the REE agencies nor the USDA have implemented an electronic recordkeeping system, electronic records must be preserved in their native/original, format, or must be printed out or converted to microfilm.

As of the date of this manual, you, as Federal REE employees, are responsible for following the original language in GRS 20. For additional information on the court cases or current NARA guidance regarding electronic recordkeeping, refer to the ERM Initiative Guidance Products on the NARA webpage.

Distinguishing Record from Nonrecord Data

To determine whether electronic or automated information is a record or nonrecord, apply the same criteria you use for paper and records in other media, or ask your RMO. If, for example, electronic versions serve as the official record of correspondence, files, reports, and other official information, then they must be managed as record material.

Record materials are created or received by a Federal agency either to comply with a law or to conduct public business. Records also document an agency's organization, functions, and activities, or the persons, places, things, or matters dealt with by an agency. Nonrecord materials consist primarily of duplicate copies kept for convenience of use or reference, which do not become part of an agency's activities, functions, or decision-making processes. Only the agency RMO can determine record or nonrecord status, in consultation with NARA and USDAs Office of the General Counsel. When it is difficult to determine whether certain files are records or nonrecord material, they should be treated as records until the matter is officially resolved.

Examples of Nonrecord Material in Electronic Form:

- Duplicate information that is maintained in hard copy as well as electronically on word processing diskettes or other similar media and stored in electronic form only to facilitate updating or revision of the material at a later date.
- Work papers and personal notes in electronic form that have no record value because they are meaningless to persons other than the individual who created them; provide no rationale, sense of direction, or guidance above and beyond that documented in the official files; and generally are used only by the author to facilitate the development and finalization of papers for approval by appropriate officials.
- Miscellaneous informal email messages that do not contain information on, nor result in, and cannot be construed to imply, policy of any element of the agency and have not been placed in the official files.

Examples of Record Material in Electronic Form:

- Informational material, such as graphic images, created or maintained only in electronic form and never exactly reproduced in hard copy form.
- Email messages which contain statements of policy, rationale for a decision, sense of direction, or guidance above and beyond that documented in official files. Such electronic records need to be stored in a medium that adequately provides for the security, safety, and retrievability of the record until its disposition date.
- The output of electronic information systems that support agency management functions such as statistical survey programs, procurement programs, and correspondence tracking systems regardless of whether all or a portion of the information is also maintained in hard copy.
- Extracts of electronic information systems maintained in electronic form for the purpose of conducting studies and statistical analyses. This includes databases obtained from outside sources, as well as those created within the agency.
- Any electronic information file, regardless of its size, containing personal information on individuals which can be retrieved by a unique personal identifier, such as a name or an assigned number. These files are referred to under the Privacy Act as "Systems of Records" and are protected from unauthorized disclosure. For more information on the Privacy Act (PA) refer to P&P 158.1, "Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act Guidelines," or contact your agency Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)/Privacy Act (PA) Officer.

Special Characteristics of Electronic Records

- Electronic records are usually created or stored on erasable, reusable media, such as diskettes or magnetic tape.
- Because they are fragile, they should be managed early in their life cycle.
- Because most electronic data are easy to update, revise, and reuse, their life cycle tends to be shorter and more complex than that of paper records.
- They require detailed technical documentation to understand and administer.
- They are best managed in the context of an information system which is comprised of input or source documents, records residing on electronic media, and outputs, along with related documentation and any indexes or finding aids. Each component of an electronic information system must be scheduled individually.

Recordkeeping Requirements

Establishing recordkeeping requirements for an information system requires full and accurate documentation of the system, including:

- Functions supported by the system.
- Operational, legal, audit, oversight, or historical requirements for the information.
- Use, access, and maintenance of the data to meet the differing requirements.
- Procedural controls used to preserve data integrity.

Scheduling Electronic Records

PMs and functional specialists should work closely with the agency RMO in designing new or in modifying existing systems to ensure that appropriate dispositions are in place when the systems become operational or after system modifications are completed. Legally, official records consisting of electronic data cannot be modified or destroyed without prior NARA approval.

NARA needs the following information to approve electronic record dispositions:

- A brief description of the information in the system including:
  - the primary subject matter
  - time span
  - geographic coverage
  - update cycle
  - whether the system saves superseded information
  - whether the system contains micro or summary data
- The authorizing law or directive for the program.
- The agency program(s) supported by the information.
- The purpose of or functions performed by the information system.
- The sources of the data in the system, or inputs.
- The reports or other outputs the system produces.
- System documentation, such as user manuals, data dictionaries, code books, or system design and analysis manuals.

This information must be submitted in consultation with the agency RMO and by using form SF-115[2], Request for Records Disposition Authority.

Designing and Developing Electronic Systems

Effective management of electronic records demands coordination among three different groups within the agency:

- **Information System (Program) Manager.** The designated agency official(s) responsible for overseeing the creation and use of electronic records in an information system.
- **Chief Information Officer (CIO).** The designated agency official(s) responsible for the acquisition and technical operation of computer and communications systems, and for carrying

out agency Information Resource Management (IRM) functions as required under various Federal regulations, such as the Paperwork Reduction Act.

- **Records Management Officer (RMO).** The designated agency official(s) responsible for ensuring the proper creation, maintenance, use, and disposition of agency records.

The RMO should work closely with each agency's program and CIO staff to ensure that all electronic systems are designed and implemented to conform to sound records management principles.

Managing the Life Cycle of Records Produced by an Office Automation System

Office automation systems that maintain the record copy on electronic media must meet the following minimum requirements:

- Allow all authorized users of the system to retrieve desired documents through such means as indexing or text search.
- Provide an appropriate level of security to ensure the integrity of the records.
- Provide a standard interchange format, when necessary, to permit the exchange of documents on electronic media between computers using different software or operating systems and the conversion or migration of documents on electronic media from one system to another.
- Accommodate the requirements for transferring permanent records to NARA.

Before its creation on an office automation system that will maintain the official file copy on electronic media, each document must be identified sufficiently to allow authorized personnel to protect, retrieve, and otherwise manage records in the system until and including their final disposition. Appropriate identifying information for each record maintained on the electronic media may include office of origin, file code, key words for retrieval, addressee, signatory, author, date, authorized disposition, and security classification, if applicable.

Maintaining Electronic Records

Permanent records must be maintained in an acceptable format which is not dependent on individual hardware or software. Currently, NARA can only accept electronic records if they are written in ASCII, EBCDIC, and Portable Document Format (PDF); are created on, or can be converted to, one-half inch, nine track magnetic tape, 18 track 3480 class tape cartridges, and Compact Disk-Read Only Memory (CD-ROM). Permanent records may also be transferred via File Transfer Protocol (FTP), and Digital Linear Tape (DLT), Type IV. PMs, IT staff, and the RMO should jointly determine the appropriate medium for the transfer of permanent electronic records on an individual basis.

The media on which electronic records are recorded are fragile and must be protected from loss or premature destruction. PMs must ensure that:

- The media are stored in accordance with NARA regulations.
- Permanently valuable electronic records are stored in discrete files.

- A second agency copy is maintained until the agency is officially notified, by confirming receipt, that NARA has received and verified the transfer.

Those involved in creating electronic systems must select the appropriate media for storing agency records throughout their life cycle. The selected media format must:

- Permit quick and easy retrieval.
- Provide search capability.
- Protect the records from destruction by accident, catastrophe, or unauthorized access.
- Retain the records in a usable format until their authorized disposition date.
- Meet the requirements for retiring permanent records to NARA, if applicable.

NARA has issued guidance on the transfer of the following permanent electronic records:

- Web content records.
- Digital geospatial data records.
- Digital photographic records.
- Electronic records in Portable Document Format (PDF).
- Existing scanned images of textual records.
- Existing email messages with attachments.

These requirements should be addressed in the design, implementation, and maintenance of every electronic system that contains permanent records. Therefore, it is especially critical to involve the RMO in the earliest stages of system development.

To ensure that information is not lost because of changing technology or deterioration, PMs, RMOs, and CIO staff must plan and implement a migration strategy that will provide compatibility with the agency's current hardware and software through the conversion of storage media. Before conversion to a different medium, PMs, the RMO and CIO staff must determine that the authorized disposition of the electronic records can be implemented after the conversion, and that the records have not been altered or compromised.

7. Email

Employees need to consider the following in deciding how to properly handle email messages that they have sent or received:

- When is an email message a record?
- If it is a record, what should I do to preserve it?

To answer the first question, consider the definition of “record” and then determine whether the information contained in the email message meets any of the criteria contained in that definition. Email messages that meet the definition of records have one or more of the following attributes:

- Contain information developed in preparing briefing papers, reports, and studies.
- Reflect official actions taken while conducting agency business.
- Convey information on agency programs, policies, and essential activities.
- Convey statements of policy or the rationale for official decisions or actions.

- Document oral exchanges, such as meetings or telephone conversations, during which policy was discussed or formulated or agency activities were planned or discussed.

Separate email messages that contain the same information on official activities may differ in important respects. Therefore, having duplicate messages does not necessarily mean that one is a nonrecord. If more than one office takes action or otherwise uses copies of the same message, each copy is considered to be a record.

Both the email message and the transmission and receipt data are Federal records and must be maintained for the same length of time. The following transmission and receipt data should be printed out and attached to the email record:

- sender and addressee(s)
- date and time the message was sent
- date and time the message was received
- acknowledgment of receipt or access by the addressee(s)

Maintaining Records Created in an Email System

Employees must follow GRS 20 in ensuring that email records are copied to a paper, microform, or electronic recordkeeping system. Because none of the REE agencies are currently employing an electronic recordkeeping system, all email messages that meet the definition of a record must be printed out and maintained in a paper-based filing system.

System backup tapes are not suitable for recordkeeping purposes because they are merely a storage medium for the data, and do not provide a means for organizing, searching, retrieving, or managing the documents based on their disposition. System backup tapes are only meant to recreate email messages in an emergency.

Disposition of Email and Word Processing Records

Agency staff should continue to follow GRS 20 in disposing of certain electronic versions of email, word processing documents, and other computer-generated material if they are first saved by copying to a paper, microform, or electronic recordkeeping system. NARA will now accept the transfer of permanent email messages and their attachments in standard markup language, or in their native format, if:

- They are part of an identifiable, organized body of records, such as the email records of the Deputy Administrator.
- The records are scheduled for transfer in an approved SF-115.
- They are part of an email system or from a DoD 5015.2 Certified Records Management Application.

NARA will accept attachments in their native formats, such as PDF, image file formats, and common office automation formats. At the time this manual was written, NARA will not accept email messages that have been converted to PDF or other image file formats for purposes of transfer.

NARA has published specifications governing the transfer of permanent electronic records, including email. NARA prefers that agencies transfer email and their attachments in a markup language format that contains:

- Coding to indicate the beginning and end of each message and the beginning and end of each attachment.
- Labels to identify each part of the message, such as date, recipients, sender, subject, message, and attachment; and transmission and receipt information.

You must therefore consult your RMO before preparing any records for transfer, as NARA requires that the agencies supply documentation that identifies:

- Email application and version
- Operating system and version
- Records Management Application, if applicable, and version
- Total number of messages
- Total number of attachments
- List of message delimiters and definitions
- Structure used for each email item in the transfer
- Description of the arrangement of records.

NARA prefers to receive email transfers in a single uncompressed file on one-half inch, nine track magnetic tape, 18 track 3480 class tape cartridges, or Compact Disk-Read Only Memory (CD-ROM). NARA will also accept permanent records in Portable Document Format (PDF) transferred via File Transfer Protocol (FTP), and Digital Linear Tape (DLT), Type IV. PMs, the agency RMO, and CIO staff should jointly determine the appropriate medium for the transfer of permanent electronic records on an individual basis.

Be sure to contact your RMO if you have any questions about any electronic recordkeeping or transfer requirements.

Guidance for the Disposition of Short-Term Temporary Records (including Email)

NARA has recently issued guidance to Federal agencies allowing the disposal of short-term temporary email records (that is, those with dispositions of six months or less) without creating a paper or electronic recordkeeping copy. Email covered under this guidance can remain in a live email system, provided that:

- Users do not delete the messages before the expiration of the NARA-approved retention period.
- The system's automatic deletion rules ensure the preservation of the records for the length of the retention period.
- All records that have been requested under FOIA or that are the subject of audit, investigation, or litigation, can be frozen until the matter is resolved.

These records may include:

- Routine requests for information or publications and replies which require no administrative action, no policy decision, and no special compilation or research.

- Copies of letters of transmittal that do not add any information to that contained in the transmitted material.
- Announcements and notices, such as charity and welfare fund appeals, bond campaigns, and holiday announcements, that do not serve as the basis for official actions.
- Records of routine activities containing no substantive information, such as routine notifications of meetings and other schedule related activities.
- Suspense or tickler files or to-do and task lists that serve only as reminders.

NARAs guidance relating to the disposition of transitory records covered by GRS 23 can be found on the NARA Web site at:

Memorandum reference:

http://www.archives.gov/records-mgmt/memos/nwm15-2006.html

Guidance:

http://www.archives.gov/about/regulations/part-1234.html

Internet or Other External Communications Systems

Many employees are connected to external electronic communications systems such as the Internet or other commercial network services. The use of external communications systems that are neither owned nor controlled by the agency does not mean that the documents you receive are not records. The agency still has an obligation under the Federal Records Act to maintain all Federal records created by these systems. Those who use these systems must ensure that Federal records sent or received on these systems are preserved, and must take reasonable steps to capture available transmission and receipt data and the identities of the recipients.

8. Web Records

This section provides guidance to REE agency webmasters on the transfer of permanent websites to NARA. Each agency website is a Federal record that documents agency activities, policies, and procedures. In addition, some web pages and other features are permanent records. All agency websites should be inventoried and scheduled on an SF-115.

Web records may include:

- http files
- images, audio or video files, or proprietary format
- program or administrative records documenting the management of websites
- links to other pages outside the agency’s domain
- both static and dynamic content

Web Records - Temporary

Records documenting the management of the website, and referenced content that resides in a different domain and is not managed for the agency under a formal agreement, are not considered to be permanent records.

Web Records - Permanent

Web records deemed permanent because of their function or content must be maintained by the agency until their scheduled transfer to NARA. NARA has established the following minimum requirements for transfer of web content records:

Acceptable Formats

NARA will accept source documents from the server in HTML or XML, and web content that can be read by a standard web browser.

The complete web content record must be transferred including:

All associated files that were used to create the web content record. For example, image, audio, video, and proprietary files must be transferred with the HTML or XML file in which they are embedded.

Style Sheets

Cascading Style Sheets used in HTML files, must be transferred directly from the web server. XML files must be accompanied by an XML schema (WXS) or a Document Type Definition (DTD) and appropriate style sheets.

What to Transfer/Not Transfer

- Scripts embedded in the HTML documents must be retained as part of the file.
- Files that are not part of the web content records but are collocated in a directory with those files **must not be transferred**.

Links

- All internal links must remain active.
- All external links must be disabled, but agencies should include comment or documentation describing the content of significant external links. These comments should include the title of the linked content, the source agency or institution, and its significance.

Database-driven, server-side, dynamic environments with interactive content must include:

- The web forms that initially connect the user to a database or server.
- The business process that filters input to the database, if appraised as permanent.
- The database itself, which must be transferred as described in 36 CFR 1228.270 (http://www.archives.gov/research_room/center_for_electronic_records/transfer_records_to_nara.html).

- Currently, NARA can only accept electronic records if they are written in ASCII, EBCDIC, and Portable Document Format (PDF); are created on, or can be converted to, one-half inch, nine track magnetic tape, 18 track 3480 class tape cartridges, and Compact Disk-Read Only Memory (CD-ROM). NARA will also accept permanent records transferred via File Transfer Protocol (FTP), and Digital Linear Tape (DLT), Type IV.

Transferred web records must be accompanied by a signed and completed SF-258, Agreement to Transfer Records to the National Archives of the United States. In addition, NARA requires the following documentation, if applicable:

- Web platform and server, including the specific software applications.
- Name of the website.
- URL of the website, including the filename of the starting page of the transferred content.
- Organizational unit primarily responsible for management of the site.
- Method of capture: the application used if harvested, and the software and version used if PDF.
- Contact information for the individual completing the capture.
- The name and version of any content management system used.
- All filenames, including the path or directory name.
- The relationship between the web interface, the business logic, and the database.

Web content records may be transferred by:

- Web harvesting
- Capturing in PDF
- Manually downloading and copying

Web content captured and transferred in PDF must conform to NARA PDF Transfer Guidance issued March 31, 2004 (located at http://www.archives.gov/records_management/initiatives/pdf_records.html). Currently, NARA can only accept electronic records if they are written in ASCII, EBCDIC, or PDF and are created on, or can be converted to, one-half inch, nine track magnetic tape, 18 track 3480 class tape cartridges, and Compact Disk-Read Only Memory (CD-ROM). NARA will also accept permanent records transferred via File Transfer Protocol (FTP), and Digital Linear Tape (DLT), Type IV. Web records should not be compressed prior to transfer, unless authorized by NARA.

For more details, see NARA's guidance, "Expanding Acceptable Management E-Gov Initiative Transfer Instructions for Permanent Electronic Records," at *http://www.archives.gov/records_management/initiatives/web_content_records.html.*

9. Vital Records

Vital records are essential records that are needed to meet the agencies' operational responsibilities in the event of an emergency or disaster, or are needed to preserve the Government's rights and interests or those of its citizens. Records that are necessary for the continued operation of an agency during or after a disaster or emergency are called emergency operating records. Records that preserve the legal rights and interests of the Government and its citizens are called legal and financial rights records, or rights and interests records. Vital records are irreplaceable, and require the highest level of protection from loss. REE administrators are responsible for:

- Establishing and maintaining a simple and effective vital records program.
- Identifying and selecting records essential to the agency’s continued operation during and after an emergency or disaster.
- Ensuring that the agency’s vital records are protected against damage or loss.
- Ensuring that vital records are current, complete, protected, and available so that the agency can continue to function in the event of an emergency or disaster.

This section establishes procedures for identifying, maintaining, and safeguarding records necessary to ensure the continuity of essential agency functions during and following an emergency or natural disaster.

Implementing a Vital Records Program

Each agency must establish a vital records program that is as simple and cost-effective as possible. Vital records normally consist of duplicate copies of the original records in paper, microform, or electronic form, whichever is most appropriate. Microfilm may not always be appropriate as it requires the use of readers and printers, and only one person can use them at a time. Further, it is not cost-effective to use microfilm for vital records that must be updated frequently. Electronic media also pose access issues, and must be closely monitored to guard against deterioration and obsolescence.

Contingency Planning

Contingency planning prepares the agency to meet its responsibilities under other than normal operating conditions. Contingency planning includes an analysis of actual or potential hazards to agency operations and records and the probability of occurrence. Hazards may include fire, flood, theft, explosion, sabotage, war, sudden attack, structural building failures, and environmental emergencies. Such planning is critical in assessing the agency's vital records needs and program requirements, and in determining the means required to protect and recover records that may be damaged or destroyed. The planning process should lead to the development of procedures that address various actual or potential hazards ranging from limited or minor emergencies to major disasters. The following questions should be considered:

- What basic agency operations must continue during an emergency or disaster?
- What are agency staff responsibilities under such conditions?
- What records are required to support those responsibilities, to resume basic functions following the emergency or disaster, and to protect the rights and interests of the Government and its citizens?
- What procedures and resources must be available to protect against loss of records and to recover or replace damaged or destroyed records.

Identifying, Protecting, and Managing Vital Records

The USDA Records Management Directive (http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/files/dr/DR3080-001.htm) charges agency heads with the responsibility for developing and implementing a plan for identifying and protecting the agency's vital records. Critical to this effort is the creation of a team composed of information resources, records, emergency coordination, facilities, public affairs, security, and safety officials, who will:

- Develop and maintain a current inventory of agency vital records and information systems.
- Determine the most appropriate and economical format for creating and maintaining copies of vital records.
- Devise a system for updating records in order to maintain the most current copies.
- Arrange for the offsite storage of these copies.

It is important to limit vital records storage and maintenance to a volume that can be reasonably managed.

Records considered to be vital will vary from agency to agency, and will depend on agency functions, activities, and responsibilities. However, records that are normally determined to be vital include:

- Statements of agency missions in an emergency.
- Delegations of authority and successions to command.
- Regulations or announcements to be issued immediately at the beginning or end of an emergency.
- Lists of employees assigned emergency duties.
- Information concerning the whereabouts of vital records.
- Information about agency personnel, property, damage, and assessment data.
- Fiscal records such as periodic summaries of financial status and records of monies received by and owed to the Government.
- Engineers' drawings, explanations of complex industrial processes, and lists of suppliers for items and materials not readily available.

Some records, such as blueprints and deeds, retain their vital status for a long period of time. In other cases, records such as account statements and similar types of accounting and payroll documents are vital only while they are current. In fact, few vital records have permanent value.

Duplicate vs. Original Records

Vital records are generally comprised of duplicate copies of original records which are then stored offsite in a secure location. However, agencies may choose to store the original records offsite if original signatures are necessary. These records, to be of real value, must be aggressively managed to keep them current and complete.

Storage Considerations

After copies of vital records are made, they are then stored at designated alternate facilities. Factors to consider in the choice of an alternate location include:

- Size and volume of the records
- Frequency with which the records need to be updated
- Costs involved
- Security precautions and enforcement.

Further, the choice of an offsite storage facility will depend on the type of vital record:

- **Emergency operating records** should be stored reasonably near the agency for immediate use in the event of disaster, but not so close that the same disaster may affect both facilities. Note that FRCs may accept only limited volumes of emergency operating records.
- **Legal and financial rights (formerly "rights-and-interests") records** can be stored at an offsite location which could also include an FRC.

Handle records falling into both categories as emergency operating records.

Management Controls

Agency heads must ensure that management controls are applied to offsite copies to ensure that they are accurate, current, and complete.

Disposition of Vital Records

Vital record dispositions are the same for copies as for originals. Dispose of temporary vital records based on the GRS or agency records retention and disposition schedules.

The original copies of vital records that have been appraised and scheduled as permanent must be transferred to NARA as provided in the agency records retention and disposition schedule. After original copies are retired, duplicate copies no longer needed for current business may also be disposed of.

10. Safeguarding Records

Employees are obligated to protect certain records against premature or unauthorized disclosure, including:

- Records protected under the Privacy Act (see P&P 158.1, "Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act Guidelines" <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ppweb/158-01.htm> covering systems of records which contain personal identifiers, such as personnel records that display social security numbers or residential addresses.
- Proprietary records such as a contract proposal that contains a proprietary formula for a youth elixir.
- Agency-sensitive records such as statistical reports containing time-sensitive information on crop estimates or agricultural census data restricted under 7USC.

Such records, regardless of format, should be physically secured in a locked file cabinet or room, or, if electronic, password-protected (refer to P&P 253.3, ARS Information Systems Security Program <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ppweb/253-03.htm> or contact your Agency System Security Officer for detailed instructions). Only REE personnel who need information in order to carry out an agency function can have access to these records.

National security classified records must be protected as required by Departmental regulation (http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/doc/DR3440-001.htm).

11. Storing Records

All employees should routinely retire or transfer inactive records to FRC storage according to the disposition instructions contained in agency records retention schedule(s) and the GRS.

Storing Records at Federal Records Centers

Federal Records Centers serve as extra storage space for Federal agencies and are the preferred storage option for records which are no longer needed for current business. FRCs store permanent and temporary paper records and make them available to authorized agency staff at their request. The FRCs charge agencies for all records services and storage. FRCs and their locations, as well as the areas they service, are located on the NARA Website at NARA - Locations Nationwide - Main Page

Custody

FRCs only make records available to authorized employees within the agency and with approval of the agency RMO, since the agency retains legal custody of records while they are stored at the FRC. Agencies retain legal custody of permanent records until they are transferred to the National Archives at which time NARA then assumes ownership. FRCs will only dispose of eligible temporary records after first obtaining the agency RMO's signed authorization.

Are Your Records Eligible for Storage at a Federal Records Center?

Store records in an FRC if they are:

- no longer needed onsite for audit or legal purposes
- consulted less than once per month
- covered by a NARA-approved disposition from the GRS or from the agency's records retention and disposition schedules
- not eligible for destruction within 1 year from the date of transfer
- not on electronic or audiovisual media

There are a few exceptions to these rules:

- Under certain circumstances, the agency RMO may obtain special authorization to retire records which have a proposed disposition pending NARA approval.
- FRCs may only accept small volumes of vital emergency operating records.
- Microform records can only be retired to two FRCs which have appropriate storage facilities: the St. Louis, Missouri FRC, and the WNRC in Suitland, Maryland.

Preparing Records for Storage

Before boxing records:

- Verify that the records are covered by an approved disposition.
- Screen or weed the files to remove and destroy all nonrecord material such as extra copies or reference material.
- Confirm that the files are completed or closed.
- Organize the files for retirement based on their disposition instructions. Records that are so voluminous that records schedules require that they be cut off at regular intervals into blocks may only be transferred to NARA in the groups specified by the retention schedule. For example, "Transfer to NARA in 10 year blocks when most recent records are 15 years old" means that files cut off at the end of 1980 and spanning the end of1990, should be retired fifteen years later. In this case, they were eligible for transfer during the next transfer cycle after December 2005, which occurred in January 2006. Keep in mind that the blocking pattern is established based on when the first files are retired. As always, if you have difficulty interpreting transfer instructions feel free to contact your agency RMO.
- Separate records by series. A record series is a group of records arranged according to a filing system or kept together because they relate to a particular subject or function, result from the same activity, document a specific kind of transaction, take a particular physical form, or have some other relationship arising out of their creation or use. A record series readied for transfer to an FRC **has the same disposition authority and the same disposition date**. Each item in the GRS or agency-specific records schedules represents a series. Laboratory notebooks, director's correspondence, grant case files, and T&As are all records series.
- Do not commingle permanent records with temporary records in the same series. Retire each type as a separate accession.
- Separate multiple series of records into individual accessions by year. For example, T&As should be divided by year and one accession number assigned for each year.
- Do not place records with different disposition dates in the same box **except when retiring single box accessions**. Because the FRCs place special emphasis on managing their space efficiently, and because of the storage costs charged to the agency for each box, give priority to filling the box rather than separating the files by disposition date when retiring less than 1 cubic foot of records. For example, it is preferable to fill one box with 2 years of T&As than to separate the files into two half filled boxes.
- If the records are not already foldered, for instance if they are in binders, place records in standard or expansion file folders labeled by subject or title as appropriate except where the binder helps to maintain the integrity of the binder contents, such as for briefing books.
- Include all guides and tabs separating the folders in the box if they help to provide access to the files.

Preparing Form SF-135, Records Transmittal and Receipt, and Box List

- **Headquarters** employees must send a completed SF-135 and an inventory or "box list", to the agency RMO for approval before shipping the records. The SF-135 and box list are used for control purposes so that once the records are shelved at the FRC they can be quickly retrieved (particularly in the event of an audit, investigation, or FOIA request) before their scheduled destruction date.

- **Field** employees should submit completed SF-135s directly to the FRC that services your area - unless other arrangements are made with the RMO.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Detailed Instructions for Preparing SF-135,
Records Transmittal and Receipt, and box list(s).</th></tr>
<tr><th>Headquarters Offices (including Washington, DC; Maryland; Virginia; and West Virginia Offices)</th><th>Field Offices</th></tr>
<tr><td>1. Complete blocks 1, 3, 5 and 6 (d-i).

Make sure you begin block 6(f) with the title of the organizational component that created the records.

2. Use any standard word-processing or spreadsheet software to prepare a box list detailing the contents of each box in the accession.

3. Send the SF-135 and the box list to the RMO, who will assign an accession number and review, sign, and forward the form to the WNRC for approval.

4. Once you receive the WNRC approved SF-135, place one copy along with the box list in the first box of the accession.

5. After the boxes are shelved the WNRC will return a copy of the SF-135 to the RMO who will forward you a copy. Retain this copy for future reference as it includes the shelf location code (block 6[j] of the SF- 135) needed when retrieving these records at a future date.</td><td>1. Complete an original and two copies of the SF-135 following instructions found on the back of the form or contained in the Informs software application.

2. Obtain accession numbers from the FRC in your area.

3. Use Word or Excel to prepare a box list detailing the contents of each box in the accession.

4. Sign and forward the original and one copy to the FRC servicing your area. Hold one copy for your suspense file. The FRC will review the SF-135 for completeness and accuracy. When it is approved, normally within 10 business days, the FRC will return an approved copy of the SF-135 to you authorizing shipment of the boxes.

5. Place the approved copy of the SF-135 and the box list in the first box of the accession before shipping it to the FRC.

6. The FRC will return a copy of the SF-135 to you as a receipt when the records have been shelved. Retain this copy for future reference as it includes the shelf location code (block 6[j] of the SF-135) needed when retrieving these records at a future date.

7. Forward a copy of the final approved SF-135 with the location code to the RMO for the master file.</td></tr>
</table>

Boxing Records

Choosing the Appropriate Box

Place records to be retired or transferred in official records boxes prior to moving them from office space. The following table lists four boxes that meet NARA guidelines. Use the proper box type and size when packing records. Official records boxes should **not** be used for packing personal or nonrecord materials.

- **Headquarters and field employees** should obtain boxes through normal supply channels or order directly from the General Services Administration (GSA), as follows:

GSA Stock #	Description	Unit
NSN 8115-00-117-8249	Standard size - white, 14-3/4"x12"x9-1/2" **Used for:** standard and legal size file folders	bundle[3]
NSN 8115-00-117-8338	Half size - natural (tan), 14-3/4"x9-1/2"x4-7/8" **Used for:** standard and legal size file folders, cassette tapes, microforms, and videos	bundle
NSN 8115-00-117-8347	Special use - white, 14-3/4"x11-3/4"x11-3/4" **Used for:** magnetic tapes	bundle
NSN 8115-01-025-3254	Special use - natural (tan), 14-3/4" x 6-1/2" x 4-1/2" **Used for:** microforms	bundle

- Place letter size records in the box with folders facing you as you're looking at the labeled end (opposite the stapled end).
- Place legal size records in the box so that the labels face the left side of the box as you're looking at the labeled end.
- Do not overfill the boxes. Allow about an inch leeway in each box to work the files.
- Never place additional material on the bottom, side, or top of the records in the box.
- **Do not mark the boxes with permanent ink until you have received agency and/or FRC approval to retire them to storage**. Use of a pencil is highly recommended for marking boxes prior to receiving final FRC approval.

Preparing a Box List

- Prepare the box list using any standard word-processing or spreadsheet application (e.g., MS Word, WordPerfect; and MS Excel or Lotus 123), listing the contents of each box in order systematically, box by box. The list should be in letter-landscape format showing each folder's subject title, file number, and any other identifying information, as described in the records disposition instructions and according to the agency filing scheme. Identify the organizational component which created the records. Also include headings for each category of information provided, such as title or name, filing code, description, or date, along with page numbering (preferably bottom-center), for easy reference. For subject files or case files containing materials spanning more than 1 year, note the date span for each folder. If there are two or more folders with the same case or subject title, note the number of folders on the box list. See the following example:

Note: Set the top margin at about 3/4" and select the letter-landscape page configuration to conform to the design of the SF-135 and to allow space for three ring binder holes.		
AFM HRD Eastern Services Branch (ESB) **Demo Case Files FY 2002**		
Box Number 1 of 42		
Announcement #	**Title**	**Pay Plan/Series/Grade**
ARS-A2E-2002	HUMAN RESOURCES SPEC	GS-201-5/9
ARS-X2E-2008	MICROBIOLOGIST (2 folders)	GS-0403-14
Page 1		

- Each accession must be listed on a separate SF-135. For example, do not list on the same SF-135 T&As for leave years 2003 and 2004. Create a separate SF-135 for each leave year.
- Headquarters staff must forward a copy of the Draft SF-135 (available in MS Word) and box list to the RMO for agency and WNRC approval.

FRCs will not store the following records:

- **Contingent records** whose disposition is dependent on some future event, such as until authorizing legislation is rescinded, except those contingent records identified as vital records.
- **Frozen records** which may not be destroyed due to audit, investigation, or legal reasons.
- **Mixed records** with commingled records series which have different disposition authorities, permanent and temporary records which are mixed together, and records of the same series with different disposal dates, such as construction contracts cut off or closed during different fiscal years.

Marking Boxes for Shipment (Headquarters and Field)

After receiving the RMO and FRC approved SF-135, write the accession number and the box number in the designated blocks on the front of each box. The accession number can be found in blocks 6 (a-c) of the SF-135. For example, the first accession in FY 2006 for RG 310 is 310-06-0001.

Do not use labels to supply additional identifying information but instead write directly on the box. The accession number and box number must be written in large, bold numbers that fill the blocks on the front of the box. Use a permanent black ink marker, preferably a wide tip felt marker, GSA item # NSN 7520-00-973-1059.

For boxes without printed blocks, uniformly write the accession number in the upper left corner and the box number in the upper right corner of each box. Begin with box number 1 and include the total number in the accession (for example, 1 of 10, 2 of 10, 3 of 10, and so on).

Shipping Instructions

Within the DC metropolitan area, the USDA Courier Service will pick up the records and deliver them to the WNRC, and will also retrieve records that have been recalled, and bring them back to the agency. Employees in the DC area should prepare record boxes for shipment by simply interlocking the top flaps inside each other. Employees outside the DC area should not write on sealing tape or obstruct the accession or box numbers if tape is used to secure the box. DO NOT TAPE THE BOXES UNLESS SHIPPING BY COMMERCIAL CARRIER.

Records approved for transfer by the FRC must be shipped within 90 days after approval is received from the FRC. Overseas locations have 120 days for the transfer. **The FRC may cancel the accession number if boxes are not received in a timely manner without explanation for the delay. The RMO or FRC will then have to assign a new accession number, you will have to fill out another SF-135 and resubmit the paperwork, and you will most likely have to rebox the files as the boxes can only be renumbered by using a special spray paint.** Headquarters staff should call the USDA Courier Service at 202-720-5869 to arrange for pick up and delivery. In field offices, the person responsible for shipping the records should coordinate delivery with UPS, a contract carrier, or through the FRC, whichever method is most cost-effective.

Stacking Record Boxes

Records boxes must be stacked according to the NARA recommended stacking order when either skids or pallets are used. Refer to Attachment 4 of the *Guide to Records Center Services* or contact your local FRC or the RMO for further instructions.

Transferring Permanent Records to NARA

All records scheduled as permanent must be transferred to NARA according to the disposition instructions contained in your agency's records schedules. Refer to the table below for guidance in transferring permanent records to NARA, or contact the RMO for assistance.

	Headquarters	**Field Offices**	**All Offices**
Records Stored in Agency Space	Call the RMO to initiate the process. The RMO will complete form SF-258 (with your assistance) and forward it to NARA.	Complete form SF-258, Agreement to Transfer Records to National Archives of the United States, and submit it to the RMO for signature.	If NARA does not accept the records, contact the RMO for assistance.
Records Stored in FRCs	The FRC forwards a partially completed SF-258 to the RMO. The RMO will approve the accession and return the completed form to the FRC.	The FRC will send a partially completed SF-258 to you. Complete the form and forward it to the RMO for signature. The RMO will sign and forward it to the FRC.	If NARA does not accept the records, contact the RMO for assistance.

12. Retrieving Stored Records

From Federal Records Centers

Headquarters (Washington, DC; Maryland; Virginia; and West Virginia)

You simply need to provide the RMO with a completed OF-11, Reference Request - Federal Records Center, including the accession number, shelf location(s), box number(s), total number of boxes in each accession, and the title (if you want an individual file folder). Refer to your office file copy of the SF-135 for this information. Also indicate the nature of the service requested, for example, if this is a permanent or temporary withdrawal or if you are only requesting a copy. The RMO will coordinate delivery by the USDA Courier Service or will arrange for other delivery options as necessary.

Do not refolder, rebox, or add files to records recalled from the FRC. They must be returned in the original folders or containers to allow for accurate refiling. If the box is unusable for shipment, copy the accession number, box number, and location onto the front of the replacement. Make sure that agency staff do not remove Form OF-11 attached by the FRC, as it must be returned with the files for refiling.

Contact the RMO when you are finished with the material so that it can be returned to the FRC. If you return the records yourself, be sure to inform the RMO so that the pending file can be closed.

Field Offices

With RMO authorization on file with NARA, you may submit a request electronically using the Centers Information Processing System (CIPS). Otherwise, complete form OF-11, and mail, email, fax, or deliver it to your RMO. Contact the RMO or your nearest FRC for more information about CIPS.

On form OF-11, furnish the accession number, agency box number, FRC location number, and the nature of the service, for example, permanent or temporary withdrawal or requesting a copy of the file. Retain a suspense file copy, except when the records are security classified. If the records are classified “Secret” or higher, send three copies and retain a photocopy of the completed form as the suspense copy.

Use a separate OF-11 for each folder or box requested unless the request is for permanent withdrawal. Photocopies of OF-11s are acceptable.

Do not refolder, rebox, or add files to records recalled from the FRC. They must be returned in the original folders or containers. If the box is unusable for shipment, copy the accession number, box number, and location onto the front of a new box. Agency staff should not remove the agency copy of the OF-11 attached by the FRC, as it is used to facilitate refiling.

Borrowing Records Transferred to NARA

When permanent records are transferred to NARA using form SF-258, legal custody is handed over from the agency to NARA. Written requests to borrow original records transferred to NARA may be approved for agencies with a demonstrated need. Requests for copies of materials may be submitted to the RMO who will make arrangements for reproduction. Fees for this service are based on the record media to be duplicated and number of copies requested.

13. Disposing of Records

Employees are responsible for disposing of eligible temporary records stored in office space once the retention period for the records expires. That is, providing the records are not involved in litigation, audit, or other action requiring that they are kept beyond the normal retention period.

Disposing of Privacy Act or Proprietary Records

When destroying Privacy Act or proprietary materials, **ensure that materials are shredded or burned** to prevent unauthorized disclosure of the protected information they contain.

Disposal by Federal Records Centers

Currently, the FRCs will dispose of records only with written authority from the RMO. Ninety days prior to the scheduled destruction date (120 days for overseas locations), the FRC will send form NA-13001, Notice of Intent to Destroy Records, to the RMO. The RMO will transmit the NA-13001 to the office that transferred the records or currently has responsibility for them. If you receive form NA-13001 and agree that the records should be destroyed, sign, date, and return the form to the RMO. Cross out the applicable items on your file copy of the SF-135 to indicate that they have been destroyed. To extend the disposal date, write a brief justification and attach it to the form with a proposed new disposal date, and then sign, date, and return the form to the RMO.

Extending Retention Periods

You should dispose of temporary records as soon as possible after retention periods expire. However, there are some circumstances when records are needed beyond their destruction date for program, audit, or legal needs. In these cases, retention periods may be extended with NARA approval. If you wish to retain a record more than a few months above the approved retention period, justify the extension in writing, and send the request for the extension with the justification to the RMO. The RMO will review the request and forward it to NARA for concurrence.

The REE RMO maintains a small records depository in the South Agriculture Building where qualified records can be stored for a short time while they are processed for retirement, transfer, or destruction.

REE Washington metropolitan area employees may retire records to the depository if the records are:

- Temporary but ineligible for transfer to the WNRC, and ONLY if the agency is willing to commit resources for processing, maintaining, and storing the records.

- Part of a project that will be completed within three to six months.
- Permanent and eligible for transfer to the National Archives but have not been thoroughly indexed, if the agency is willing to commit resources, and if the indexing will be completed within a mutually agreed time frame. If the records project is not completed within the agreed time limit, including any authorized extensions, the records will be returned to the program manager.
- Eligible for transfer to the National Agricultural Library (NAL).
- Eligible for donation or transfer to other institutions.

No records will be accepted without the prior approval of the RMO or his designee. All records must be transferred in records center boxes. For temporary records eligible for transfer to FRC storage, to NAL, or for donation, staff must create and provide an accurate and detailed box list. Records will be described at the folder level unless they can be batched (grouped together within the same series).

Only agency records staff have access to the storage area; access or retrievals by unauthorized agency staff are not permitted.

Retiring Records

Agency staff who wish to transfer records to the depository must:

- Contact the REE RMO. No records will be accepted without authorization.
- Place the records in proper order in records center boxes, following the same filing system used in the office. All records must be placed in folders and labeled with a unique and specific, meaningful title.
- Complete Form ARS-99, Records Depository Transfer:
    - **Block 1, Agency.** Identify the agency, division, branch, and section.
    - **Block 3, Employee Name & Address.** Include the name and location of the person who knows the files and can answer any questions about them.
    - **Block 4, Telephone Number & Email Address.** Include the phone number and email address of the person whose name appears in Block 3.
    - **Block 8, Volume.** Include the number of cubic feet (cu. ft.) of records (1 standard records box = 1 cu. ft.).
    - **Block 9, Series Description and Inclusive Dates of Records.** Provide a complete and accurate description of the records from the records schedule including dates of the files. Also show the complete agency name at the top of this column.
    - **Block 11, Disposition Authority.** Cite the GRS or agency schedule and specific item number authorizing disposal. Give the NARA disposition job and item number if it has not yet been incorporated into pending agency records schedules. If you need help determining the disposition authority or date, contact the RMO.
- Create an accurate box list in Word or Excel at the folder level, unless records can be batched. The list must match exactly the titles and order of the boxed folders. See Section 11 of this manual for more complete instructions on boxing records and creating a box list.
- When the RMO provides an accession number, mark it on the boxes and number them according to instructions found in Section 11 of this manual. See Section 11

- Call the USDA Courier Service at 202-720-5869 to arrange for delivery, and notify the RMO when delivery to the storage area is to be made so that records staff will be available to receive the boxes, and to oversee their placement.
- Close the box(es) by interlocking the top flaps inside each other. DO NOT TAPE THE BOXES UNLESS SHIPPING BY COMMON CARRIER, OR OTHER COMMERCIAL DELIVERY SERVICE. When taping boxes please do not obscure accession or box number markings.

Once the boxes are shelved and their location entered on the transfer form, the FRC or RMO will provide the agency contact person with an agency file copy. The RMO maintains a master file copy of the form. Prior to disposal of eligible temporary records the FRC contacts the RMO who in-tern will notify and gain approval from an authorized agency contact.

Reference Requests

- Interfiling:
  - Interfiling is discouraged, because boxes should only be sent to the depository when full.
  - Records staff may interfile folders - if there is sufficient room in the boxes.
  - When practical, records will be interfiled by placing them in the last box of the accession.

Charge-out Procedures

- Agency staff will fill out the first two rows of the online form (http://www.archives.gov/midatlantic/forms/optional-form-11-courier.pdf) , and include:
  - Name of the person requesting the files
  - Agency, division, branch, and section of the person requesting the files
  - Records Series Name and Dates of records requested
  - Box # and/or Folder Name

- A copy of the charge out form must always be kept with the records.
- Call the RMO when you are ready to return records that have been temporarily withdrawn.

---

[1] *Robek, Brown, Stephens, Information and Records Management Document-Based Information Systems (Glencoe/McGraw Hill, 1995): 7.*
[2] *All forms referenced in this P&P are available from the Forms Manager or RMO.*
[3] *Bundle = 25 boxes.*