

Essential Records Protection

OVERVIEW

Essential records enable a department to resume operations after a disaster or emergency. The records may be stored in any media, e.g., paper, microfiche, magnetic disk. If lost or destroyed, essential records can be both costly and time consuming, if not impossible, to recreate.

Responsibility

Each University department is responsible for:

- Identifying and protecting records needed in an emergency and for the reestablishment of normal operations after the emergency. (*RCW 40.10*)
- Planning and putting into effect actions to protect its own records by the most economical means possible. (*RCW 40.10*)
- Maintaining a complete list of essential records and the methods used to protect them. This list is to be reviewed annually and updated if necessary (see [Essential Records List](#)).

ESSENTIAL RECORDS

Essential records may be in any media (e.g., magnetic, paper, optical, microfilm) and may have one or more of the following attributes:

- Are vital to the function and mission of the University.
- Are essential for the continuous operation or reconstruction of University-owned buildings.
- Are necessary to establish or protect the legal or financial position of the University.
- Are necessary to protect and ensure the rights and interests of the employees and clients of the University.

Identification and Protection

Identification and protection of essential records allows departments to:

- Minimize the disruption of normal business operations after an emergency.
- Minimize the economic impact of the disruption.
- Provide for rapid and smooth restoration of services.

Essential Records Protection

Identification (cont.)

- Identify those records which merit restoration if they are damaged.
- Comply with legal and regulatory requirements.

Departmental Responsibility

Each department is responsible for identifying and protecting its own essential records.

Departments may designate one person or a team of people to be responsible for records identification, protection of essential records, and recovery efforts.

IDENTIFYING ESSENTIAL RECORDS

Departments need to identify essential records in order to arrange for protection prior to a disaster.

In order to define the essential records:

- Identify the key functions and responsibilities of the department.
- Identify the records that are critical to department operations.
- Consider how department activities are to be carried out in a disaster situation.

Identifying Key

Departmental Functions

Identify key departmental functions or responsibilities based on the following criteria.

Operational

Functions which are vital to the operation and continuation of the department or the University as a whole.

Legal

Functions which provide proof of the University's legal stand on an issue.

Emergency

Functions which are needed during an emergency, e.g., telecommunications or emergency rooms.

Fiscal

Functions which prove the University's financial standings, e.g., accounts receivable or general ledgers.

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Identification Tools

Departments may use the following tools to help identify unique departmental functions.

- Organizational/functional charts.

These charts provide a comprehensive list of the department's normal functions.

- Department and/or All-University records retention schedules (*BPPM* 90.01).

These retention schedules provide a list of all records unique to the department. The schedules also indicate other copies existing elsewhere in the University.

Identifying Critical Records

Consider the following in order to identify records that are critical to department functions:

- Functions the department will be unable to perform if the record is destroyed.
- Necessity for the department to perform a particular function.
- Consequences to the University, included loss of rights or inconvenience to employees, students, clients, and/or the department, if the record is lost.
- Need for the record to be replaced or reconstructed quickly.
- Time, money, and labor costs to reconstruct the record.
- Replacement sources available for the record.
- Media format, e.g., paper, computer hard drive, disc, microfilm.
- Accessibility of the format after an emergency.

Essential Records for Emergency Operations

Disasters can create new problems which cannot be solved with existing records. Departments must consider emergency needs, and identify and prepare records for:

- Recovery procedures
- Contingency plans
- Chain of command
- Supply lists

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Essential Records (cont.)

The following are some essential records for emergency operations:

- Statements of delegation of authority and succession of command.
- Predrafted regulations and announcements to be issued immediately upon the onset of an emergency.
- Property records sufficient to provide a basis for damage assessment.
- Rosters of current and former employees listing their skills, addresses, telephone numbers, and next-of-kin or other party emergency contact information.
- Location of supplies needed to cope with an emergency.
- Listing of essential records and record of storage for retrieval of records needed to resume the functions of the department.

Protect essential records for emergency operations with other essential records. Make arrangements for immediate recall of emergency operations records when necessary.

PROTECTING ESSENTIAL RECORDS

Security copies of essential records are produced by several methods. Usually, no one method is sufficient to protect all of a department's essential records.

Departments choose protection methods based on:

- Cost and effectiveness of protection.
- Equipment necessary to carry out the protection method.
- Need for the record.
- Bulk of the record.
- Media format of the record.
- Useful life of the media.
- Availability of existing copies.
- Need for sensitivity and/or confidentiality.

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PROTECTING (cont.)

Store essential records in a format that will last as long as the records are needed. If a record is in a format only readable by specific equipment, e.g., microfilm reader, procedures for accessing and obtaining the equipment must be arranged.

Protection Methods

The following methods may be used to provide security copies of essential records.

Copies Routinely Distributed

Departments routinely distribute some documents to other offices. These other offices can be designated as security sites for those essential records.

This is the least expensive form of protection and storage, since it often occurs in the normal course of business and involves no additional costs.

Paper Duplicates

Departments produce an extra hard copy of the essential record when it is received or created.

This method is practical when the record is small or the updating cycle is frequent.

The advantage is that no specialized retrieval equipment is necessary to convert the data into readable form.

Microfilm or Computer Output Microfiche

Departments produce copies of essential records in microfilm or microfiche formats.

This method is most commonly used for providing copies of very large records or records needed for an extended period of time which are not updated frequently.

The advantages are that the media is compact, relatively easy to store and handle with a long-term media life expectancy.

The disadvantages with this media are that it requires the use of a specialized reader and printer to access the information, and the initial cost of preparing and filming the records can be high.

Magnetic/Digital Media

Departments produce record copies on magnetic or digital media, e.g., hard disks, floppy disks, Zip disks, magnetic tapes, CD ROMs, DVDs.

This method is considered acceptable for records storage when the record is too large to make paper record storage practical and the data is updated frequently.

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Magnetic/Digital Media (cont.) Magnetic media has some inherent disadvantages:

- Limited period of time during which the media can be used for reliable recording or playback of information. The useful life of magnetic media is seven to nine years.
- Data can be lost or erased due to contact with a magnetic field or improper storage conditions.
- Compatible equipment and software are required to convert the record into usable form.
- Copies of the programs, machine instructions, system documentation, and other items required to restore and access the records must be protected and saved as well.

STORING ESSENTIAL RECORDS

Once the essential records have been identified and the means of producing security copies have been determined, security site storage must be chosen.

Choose from one or more of the following storage options.

Copies Routinely Distributed

Copies of essential records are routinely distributed to other University offices in the normal course of business.

Consider this method first, since it often occurs in the normal course of business and involves no additional costs.

Off-Site Storage

Copies are generated specifically for security copy purposes and are sent to another University office or an off-site location for protection, preferably in a different building.

To be effective, departments must update security copies stored off-site on a regular and continuing basis, and must make arrangements to obtain copies promptly when needed.

On-Site Storage

Copies of essential records are stored in a closet, storage area, vault, or safe in the same vicinity as the department.

The disadvantage to the on-site storage method is that if a major disaster strikes the entire building or damages it beyond repair, there may be little chance of retrieving the records.

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On-Site Storage (cont.)

Take precautions to prevent a disaster from spreading to the areas in which the essential records are stored. Such precautions include:

- Store essential records in vaults and safes designed to provide adequate protection against most hazards, when possible.
- Correct or repair any potential fire, water, or sewer hazards.
- Secure the building against fire, flood, and other disasters.
- Keep aisles and doorways clear at all times.
- Restrict access to essential records to authorized personnel.
- Inform all employees of the location of fire extinguishers.

Use basements or ground floor areas as a last resort for storage as they are the most susceptible to water and sewer damage.

ESSENTIAL RECORDS LIST

Each University department is responsible for preparing a list that identifies the department's essential records and any methods chosen to protect them.

Departments may use the *Essential Records Schedule* to maintain the list of departmental essential records. Use of this schedule is not required.

Departments are to protect and store a copy of the essential records list in a secure location.

Required Information

Departments are to include the following information in any essential records listing:

- Department name
- Essential records series titles
- Storage media for each record series
- Update cycle or retention

Indicate the period of time each essential record is to be retained or indicate how often the record will be updated by subsequent data. It is important to establish an updating cycle as frequent as is reasonable in order to keep the information or data current.

RECORDS
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New 10-05
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BUSINESS POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

Essential Records Protection

Required Information (cont.)

If the essential record series is not updated or is retained permanently, state the life expectancy of the media and when re-copying needs to occur.

- Storage method for security copies
- Signature of the department administrator

Annual Review

Departments are to conduct an annual review of the essential records list, making changes or revisions as necessary.