

Identifying and Managing Records in Electronic Systems

Electronic records may include data in automated information systems (data files, data bases); files created using automated office application software (Word, Excel, etc), electronic mail and messages, image (bit-mapped) files and other text or numeric information. Electronic record keeping involves the use of a computer to create, store, retrieve, use and dispose of digitally recorded information.

Measures should be taken to ensure that all records, which originate or are transmitted through an automated information system, automated office application, electronic mail system, etc, are identified, retained, and managed properly. Records should be readily available and accessible to all authorized users when they need them. This means that the identity, purpose, and location of records are predictable, consistent, and reliable; methods for access and retrieval are simple and well defined; and records management practices are incorporated into day-to-day business activities.

An electronic record created or received in connection with official business, is a record that is subject to access, privacy and records management laws and regulations and retention requirements. An official record is information recorded on any medium created or received by an agency in the transaction of public business, and preserved as evidence of official government organization, policies, actions, decisions or transactions, or retained because of the value of its informational content.

Therefore, electronically recorded information that meets both of the following conditions are Federal records:

- ❖ they are made or received by an agency of the US Government under Federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business; and
- ❖ they serve as evidence of agency activities because of the value of the information they contain.

As such, electronic records, just like records on any other media, must be identified, accessible, and retained. Examples of information created or transmitted electronically that are most probably records include:

- policies and directives
- correspondence or memoranda related to official business
- work schedules and assignments
- agendas and minutes of meetings
- drafts of documents that are circulated for comment or approval

- a document that initiates, authorizes or completes a business transaction
- final reports or recommendations

The definition of official records specifically excludes extra copies of documents used for convenience or reference, library and museum material preserved for reference or exhibition purposes, and stocks of publications or blank forms. So long as one copy of an electronic record has been set aside or designated for preservation according to the Army Records Schedule, all other copies of that record may be disposed of when no longer needed for business. **Records management procedures designate the originating office as having the responsibility to preserve the record.**

Examples of other information created or transmitted electronically that are **not** identified as record material in the Army Records Schedules include:

- ❖ personal messages and announcements not related to official business
- ❖ copies or extracts of documents distributed for convenience or reference
- ❖ phone message slips
- ❖ announcements of social event, such as retirement parties or holiday celebrations.

Electronic Mail:

Electronic mail (e-mail) is the electronic transfer of information typically in the form of electronic messages, memoranda, and attached documents from one party to another party via an intermediate telecommunications system. E-mail messages consist of the message header and message contents. The header contains the mailing address, routing instructions, transmission and receipt data, and other information the system needs to deliver the e-mail correctly.

Most e-mail systems allow the attachment of documents to messages, importing text from word processing systems, forwarding messages, and distribution to individuals as well as groups.

E-mail messages are official records when they contain information identified as record material.

Automated Information Systems:

Electronic records that are part of automated information systems must be managed also and fall under the same record keeping requirements as other electronic records.

An information system is defined as the organized collection, processing, transmission, and dissemination of information in accordance with defined procedures, whether automated or manual.

Establishing record keeping requirements for an information system requires, at a minimum, full and accurate documentation of the system: the functions supported by the system; the operational, legal, audit, oversight, or historical requirements for the information; how the information will be used, accessed, and maintained on each medium to meet these differing requirements; and the procedural controls employed to preserve the integrity of the data in the system. The National Archives considers all components of electronic information systems as records: input, output, digital data stored in a variety of ways, and the related documentation.

Automated Office Applications (Word, PowerPoint, Excel, etc):

The final version of records created using office application software must also be maintained for the length of time indicated on the approved Army schedule. Whether they are maintained in electronic or hard copy form is dependent on the record application and available electronic storage. For example, if this were a record that might become part of a case file that exists only in hard copy form, it would be logical to print out a copy and place it with the rest of the file. In this instance, the electronic copy would be deleted within a specified timeframe after the record keeping copy has been produced

Image (Bit-mapped) Files:

Image files would incur the same disposition as the hard copy from which it was derived. Normally, the hardcopy files are disposed of after verification that the image file is a true representation of the hardcopy file.

Web Pages:

Web pages vary in content and sources. If the information contained and/or displayed on a web page qualifies as record material, then the owner or managing organization of that web page is responsible for ensuring the record information has a record copy identified and preserved according to the retention requirements in the Army Records Schedules.