



### Tips: Electronic Records Management

Electronic records include documents and data in electronic formats. Some electronic records are converted from other formats, like paper or microfilm, and some electronic records are originally created in electronic form (known as “born electronic”). Like all other government records, electronic records that document the official activities of government agencies must be retained in compliance with approved [Retention and Disposal Schedules](#). Schedules identify how long the records must be kept, and when records may be destroyed or sent to the [Archives of Michigan](#) for permanent preservation.

Records cannot be legally destroyed if they are not listed on a [schedule](#) (general or agency-specific). Local government agencies must prepare and submit their own schedule revision to DTMB Records Management Services if they identify unscheduled records that need to be destroyed. [The instructions and forms used to develop agency-specific schedules are available online.](#)

#### Retention and Disposal Schedules Cover All Records

Retention and Disposal Schedules apply to **all** records regardless of the

- **Tool** used to create the records (Microsoft 365 products (Word, Excel, Access, Outlook, Chat), pen and paper, social media platform, camera, scanner, etc.)
- **Format** the records exist in (paper, microfilm, electronic documents, databases, photographs, digital images, voice mail, audio and video recordings, instant messages, e-mail messages, text messages, etc.)
- **Location** where records are stored (office cubicles, file cabinets, off-site storage, hard drives, shared drives, OneDrive, SharePoint, CD/DVDs, electronic document management systems, cloud or vendor storage, external storage devices, websites, etc.)

Schedules are written to using format-neutral language, so the retention period is applicable regardless of the format of the records. Terms like, “records,” “documents,” “files,” and “folders” are used in both paper and electronic environments.

Agencies that use databases and line of business applications to store data and documents are responsible for ensuring that those electronic records are covered by an approved schedule. They also need to adopt procedures to ensure that the electronic records are routinely disposed of in compliance with the approved retention period.

#### Printing Electronic Records is Not Required for Official Recordkeeping

Records management laws (MCL 18.1284-1292, 24.401-406, and 399.809-812) do not require that records be retained in specified formats. Most agencies can decide which format they want to keep their official records in, paper or electronic. Agencies are not required to create and retain paper versions of records that are created electronically. *Note: Agencies should*



verify that the laws, regulations, and policies governing their activities do not have unique requirements.

Agencies are encouraged to follow consistent recordkeeping practices. It is important to avoid filing official records in locations that can only be accessed by one employee, like email accounts. Supervisors should designate where official records are stored and establish [recordkeeping rules](#) for the business process.

### Scanning Paper Records and Destroying the Original

If paper records are scanned in compliance with the [Standards for Capturing Digital Images from Paper or Microfilm \(effective August 15, 2005\)](#), the paper can be destroyed and the digital images can be used as records. However, some specific laws require retaining the original and should be researched prior to destroying the source documentation. Compliance with these standards ensures an acceptable reproduction of the original that can be used in a court of law as evidence.

*Note: Municipal construction documents have special requirements, see [MCL 24.402a](#) "Reproduction of construction documents; electronic or digital file format; requirements; disposal or destruction of certain construction documents; definitions" for additional information.*

### Personal Technology and Personal Records

Government records document government activities. Government employees who conduct government activities using personal resources (such as personal email accounts, social media tools (such as Facebook or Twitter), personal cell phones, home computers, etc.) are creating government records that are subject to Retention and Disposal Schedules, as well as FOIA and litigation. Local governments may have policies that prohibit the use of personal resources to conduct government activities.

Personal records document an employee's personal life, including employee benefits, personal financial accounts, health, family, social events with co-workers and friends, personal purchases and shopping, photos, videos, music, etc. They should be stored separately from government records, using non-government resources. Local governments may have policies that prohibit the use of government resources for purposes unrelated to the conduct of official business.

### File Formats and Keeping Electronic Records Accessible

Electronic records are dependent upon specific technology to be accessed and used. However, technology continues to change in unpredictable ways, and that change causes older technology to become obsolete. Technology vendors have little incentive to support older technology, so users are responsible for monitoring their electronic records, and migrating at risk electronic records to newer technology before they become inaccessible. Permanent and



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long-term electronic records (those that need to be kept for more than 10 years) will probably need to be migrated to remain accessible and usable. While records that are kept for less than 10 years can generally be stored in their original format for the full retention period.

The file format is the product of the software that was originally used to create the electronic records. It defines the structure and type of data stored in the file, and the way that data is logically arranged within the file. File formats allow a software program to retrieve and correctly interpret the information. File formats are often identified by an extension in the file name (3-4 letters separated by a period in the file name). However, multiple versions of the same software can often use the same extension, so special tools are often used to identify additional metadata about the file format to make it functional.

Migrating electronic records to new file formats must be done carefully, because each migration has the potential to change the record, and the record's integrity. Migration activities must be properly documented to maintain a record's authenticity. It is not possible to anticipate most of the technology that will exist in the future, so the goal must be to keep electronic records accessible for the next generation of technology that is coming. Preservation planning needs to focus on a 10-year timeframe, which is more realistic and manageable than a 100-year or permanent timeframe.

#### Questions?

State of Michigan

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