



CHAPTER 7

Files/Records Management

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Filing Practices

(Taken from Records Management Manual 251.8M)

1. **Document Placement.** Place documents in folder with 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. Place it toward the front of a vertical drawer so that all filed documents can be read as a book.
2. **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.
3. **Screening Files.** Commonly called purging or weeding, this is the process of reviewing the materials within each folder to remove all nonrecord or nonessential items. Make it a part of your daily routine to identify and segregate marginally valuable documents which can be filed separately with other nonrecords. It is best to file only what is needed in a folder in the first place to avoid unnecessary screening.
4. **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 eligible, retire them to the Federal Records Center (FRC). Replace folders with current folders as appropriate. It is generally best to file active records in the top three drawers of a file cabinet since active files are referred to more often than inactive. 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 at <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/recmgmt/index.htm>

5. **Filing Techniques.**
 - a. Remove all paper clips, pins, and rubber bands. Staple papers together if necessary.
 - b. File documents routinely, daily, if possible.
 - c. Include a copy of the file plan and/or folder title list in the front of each drawer.
 - d. Do not file envelopes with incoming correspondence.
 - e. File by subject if the Agency file plan does not provide for file codes.
 - f. Do not overstuff folders and filing cabinets.
 - g. Try not to file nonrecord material in the same folder with record material.
 - h. Use subject dividers to segregate large series.
 - i. Use charge-out cards so that borrowed records can be tracked.
 - j. Purge or weed nonrecord material and other documents that can be discarded on a regular basis, at least once a year.



**Records (Files)
Retention and Disposition**

<u>Record/File Type</u>	<u>Disposition</u>
Annual Reports & Plans	Current plus 5 years (in case of 5-year review).
ARS 115's	Current plus 3 years provided item has been published.
ARS 425's	Current plus 5 years (funded and unfunded).
Budget	Current plus 5 years (in case of 5-year review).
Correspondence	Varies on type of correspondence. Consult the General Records Schedules for budget, personnel, supply and other housekeeping records (see next page for complete listing). Schedule 23 addresses disposition instructions for "Records Common to Most Offices Within Agencies." (http://www.archives.gov/records-mgmt/ardor/records-schedules.html).
Patent Information	Current plus 5 years.
PCMS Documentation	Purchase Under \$2500; Current plus 3 years. Purchase Over \$2500; Current plus 6 years.
Purchase Orders	Current plus 2 years.
Status of Funds	Current plus 2 years.
Timesheets (Hard Copy)	Current plus 6 years. This should include backup documentation, i.e. leave forms.
Training Forms	Current plus 3 years.
Travel (Domestic & Foreign)	Current plus 6 years and 3 months. This includes travel authorization, travel voucher, and receipts.

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1. Records Retention and Disposition Schedules are available on the web at <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/recmgmt/schedules.htm> This includes:
 - a. General Records Schedules. See next page for listing
 - b. ARS Records Schedules, April 1980 [*PDF format available only*]
 2. REE Records Management Homepage is at <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/recmgmt/index.htm>

GENERAL RECORDS SCHEDULES

- Schedule 1. Civilian Personnel Records
 - Schedule 2. Payrolling and Pay Administration Records
 - Schedule 3. Procurement, Supply, and Grant Records
 - Schedule 4. Property Disposal Records
 - Schedule 5. Budget Preparation, Presentation, and Apportionment Records
 - Schedule 6. Accountable Officers' Accounts Records
 - Schedule 7. Expenditure Accounting Records
 - Schedule 8. Stores, Plant, and Cost Accounting Records
 - Schedule 9. Travel and Transportation Records
 - Schedule 10. Motor Vehicle Maintenance and Operations Records
 - Schedule 11. Space and Maintenance Records
 - Schedule 12. Communications Records
 - Schedule 13. Printing, Binding, Duplication, and Distribution Records
 - Schedule 14. Information Services Records
 - Schedule 15. Housing Records
 - Schedule 16. Administrative Management Records
 - Schedule 17. Cartographic, Aerial Photographic, Architectural, and Engineering Records

 - Schedule 18. Security and Protective Services Records
 - Schedule 19. RESERVED
 - Schedule 20. Electronic Records
 - Schedule 21. Audiovisual Records
 - Schedule 22. Inspector General Records (WITHDRAWN)
 - Schedule 23. Records Common to Most Offices Within Agencies
 - Schedule 24. Information Technology Operations and Management Records
 - Schedule 25. Ethics Program Records
 - Schedule 26. Temporary Commissions, Boards, Councils and Committees
 - Schedule 27. Records of the Chief Information Officer
- Forms Index
- Standard Forms
 - Optional Forms

Records Management Guidance/Assistance/Tools: File Systems

Quick Tips:

- Official record copies must be filed at the official file station.
- Reference files may be filed at your work station.
- Personal files (papers of a private or nonofficial nature) must be kept separate from the records of the office.
- Record and nonrecord materials are the property of the Federal Government, and may not be removed from the Agency. When you leave your position, you may only take your personal papers with you.

Tips for Setting Up Your Files:

- Use records schedules if they are available to arrange your records into series. A record series is a group of documents or other records maintained together because they:
 - Relate to a particular subject or function,
 - Result from the same activity,
 - Document a specific kind of transaction,
 - Are of the same physical format, or
 - Have some other relationship arising out of their creation, receipt, or use.
- Within each series, segregate in different folders documents with short-term retention periods, nonrecord material, and documents with long-term or permanent retentions.
- Series can also be further divided into subgroups according to record type, project, or other appropriate groupings for easier access and disposition.

Electronic Records

- Set up electronic files following the same filing plan and structure used for paper records, or vice versa.
- Set up the same series and folders, segregating documents by function and retention.

Retain:

- Official copies that provide information on the organization, function, policies, procedures, or operation of the agency.
- Backups of all electronic records, especially when a paper copy is not kept.
- Lists of records transferred to storage.

Discard According to the Records Retention and Disposition Schedules:

- Duplicate copies maintained in addition to official file copies.
- Courtesy letters and routine transmittal letters.
- Notices of meetings.
- Convenience, tickler, or reading files.
- Outdated reference material.
- Obsolete publications, circulars, or blank forms.
- Surplus copies of publications.

Keep Separate:

- Program records from housekeeping or facilitative records (these are general administrative and financial operating records such as budgets, ledgers, travel expenses, personnel files, and all material filed for the record elsewhere).
- Personal papers and materials.

Avoid:

- Overcrowded file folders, drawers, and boxes; this results in damage to documents, loss of labels, and difficulties in retrieval.
- When possible, the use of binding materials.

For More Information:

- Contact the REE Records Officer.
- Consult the REE Procedures Manual [Filing Systems section].
- EPA Records Management Program, "A Basic Approach to Improving Your Files."



This information was found at:

http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/recmgmt/Guidance_filesystems.htm