Records Management Basics

Definitions

What is a record?

www.epa.gov/records/whatis/

Recorded information, in any format, that is:

- created in the course of business,
- received for action, or
- needed to document EPA activities.

What is a records schedule?

www.epa.gov/records/policy/schedule/

A document that describes a group of records, and mandates:

- how long the records are kept (retention), and
- what happens to them at the end of that time period (disposition).

What is a recordkeeping system?

www.epa.gov/records/faqs/rks.htm

A system, paper-based or electronic, that:

- collects, organizes and categorizes records, and
- facilitates their preservation, retrieval, use and disposition.

What is a file plan?

www.epa.gov/records/tools/toolkits/filecode/

A document that lists the records in your office, and describes:

- how they are organized (file structure), and
- how they are maintained (procedures).

Records Lifecycle

create/ receive → **capture** → **close** → **retire*** → **transfer/ destroy**

active (create/receive – close) | inactive (retire – transfer/destroy)

*** optional**

How to Identify Records

If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, you may have a **record**:

- Was it created in the course of business?
  e.g., correspondence, agreements, studies
- Was it received for action?
  e.g., FOIA requests, controlled correspondence
- Does it document EPA activities and actions?
  e.g., calendars, meeting minutes, project reports
- Is it mandated by statute or regulation?
  e.g., administrative records, dockets
- Does it support financial obligations or legal claims?
  e.g., grants, contracts, litigation case files
- Does it communicate EPA requirements?
  e.g., guidance documents, policies, procedures

If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, you may have a **non-record**:

- Is it reference material?
  e.g., vendor catalogs, phone books, technical journals
- Is it a convenience copy?
  e.g., duplicate copies of correspondence or directives
- Is it a stock copy?
  e.g., EPA publications or forms
- Is it a draft or working paper?
  e.g., draft with no substantive comments, rough notes, calculations
  * Careful: some drafts are needed to support the decision trail or are required by a records schedule.

If you answer "yes" to this question, you may have a **personal paper**:

- Is it only related to your own affairs?
  e.g., soccer schedule, PTA roster
  * Careful: personal planners and calendars may actually be records if they document your activities for EPA.

For More Information

Contact the Records Help Desk
Phone: 202-566-1494
E-mail: records@epa.gov
Web: www.epa.gov/records

Agency Records Officer:
John Ellis, 202-566-1643
ellis.john@epa.gov

Headquarters Records Officer:
Tammy Boulware, 202-566-1665
boulware.tammy@epa.gov

Records Liaison Officers:
www.epa.gov/records/contact.htm

How to Match Records to a Schedule

Use the EPA Records Web site to find the appropriate schedules for your records. You can search by keyword or browse by title, program, applicability and more.

The schedules have several fields, but the most important are:

Number	A unique number that identifies the schedule.
Status	Review this field to see if the schedule is approved for use.
Title	Review this field to see if the schedule is a possible match for your record.
Program	Review this field to see if the schedule applies to your organization.
Applicability	Review this field to see if the schedule applies to your location.
Description	Review this field to decide if the schedule truly matches your record.
Disposition Instructions	Review this field to find requirements for maintaining and dispositioning your record.
Guidance	Review this field for more information about applicability to, and maintenance of, your record.

How to Get Started

Step 1. Conduct a survey of the records in your office. Be sure to include:

- all personnel (federal, contractor, grantee)
- and all areas (offices, storage areas, closets)

Step 2. Identify the records schedules that apply to the records.

Step 3. Create a file structure: a list of the records schedules you identified, arranged by file code.

Step 4. Build a file plan on the framework of your file structure by adding folder-level details, including:

- file folder titles (the name of each folder)
- filing procedures (the office-specific folder arrangement; e.g., alphabetical, by fiscal year, by site)
- disposition dates (the date the record is closed and destroyed or transferred)
- custodial information (the person responsible for, and the location of, the record)

Step 5. Organize your records.

- sort through each folder, discarding records that have met their retention and ensuring that the records pertain to only one records schedule
- arrange folders according to the file codes identified in your file plan
- label folders and all other media with file codes, titles or descriptions, and dates

Step 6. Review your file plan on a regular basis to update the information it contains and identify records that have met their retention.