

# **Administration of Inactive Records**

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## **Introduction**

Developing and operating a facility for the storage of inactive records is a significant part of a local government's records management program. The effectiveness of a facility, however, is directly dependent upon how soundly it is administered. Managing inactive records does not have to be an elaborate process, but it needs to be systematic and consistent, with each phase clearly defined. The purpose of this publication is to outline and describe the steps necessary to ensure efficient and effective operation of inactive records storage.

## **Management / Staffing**

In order for inactive records storage operations to run smoothly, one person - preferably the Records Management Officer (RMO) - should be administratively responsible. In cooperation with other administrators, the RMO should consider the:

- volume of inactive records (determined through the inventory process),
- number of offices transferring records,
- expected transfer schedule, and
- anticipated quantity of retrieval requests.
- These factors will directly impact staffing needs. In addition, RMOs should keep in mind that they are ultimately responsible for:
  - maintaining the integrity of transferred files,
  - overseeing their arrangement, access, and retrieval, and
  - authorizing final disposition of records.

These responsibilities also impact the scale of the records management program and the resources - including staff - necessary to carry it out. RMOs will need to provide staff with step-by-step directions for all records facility operations and build time into their own schedules for training. Documenting these policies and procedures in a manual is sound management practice for a local government records storage facility of any size, whether it is one small storeroom, scattered sites in several buildings, or a separate structure designed specifically as a records center.

## **Records Management Manual**

After the RMO formulates inactive records policies and procedures with input from relevant staff, review by the Records Advisory Board, and approval from administrators, the information should be organized within the records management program manual. Adding the inactive records policies and procedures to the manual ensures consistent practices by:

- standardizing procedures,
- defining responsibilities,
- assisting in employee training, and
- allowing for revision of policies, procedures, and organizational structure.

The manual is an excellent reference tool for new staff and can greatly reduce the number of questions local government people may have about records management. Clearly presenting inactive records policies and procedures in the manual increases the likelihood of staff following them as well as their appreciation and understanding of the entire records management program. (See examples of manuals in Appendices.)

## Storage Facility Operations

### ***Transfer:***

When gathering information during development of policies and procedures, the RMO should directly involve the heads of units transferring records to the facility. As site operations begin, the RMO will need their support in preparing records for transfer. Consider whether an overall organization policy is best or individual unit policies, which take into account differences among offices in workflow, records series, and timetables. It may be helpful to involve staff as liaisons between separate offices and records managers. Records managers should also keep in mind that local government staff will transfer records to the storage facility if they feel certain expectations will be met, namely:

- favorable environmental conditions,
- careful handling,
- security and confidentiality, and
- accessibility and easy retrieval.

The records management manual should state clearly that legal custody of inactive records remains with the records creator and that the local government, as a whole, owns them. Procedures for access, disposition, and duplication of inactive records must be worked out among the records creator, the RMO, and the local government administrators.

### **Transfer Schedules:**

Offices should transfer records to the storage facility on a regular basis, set up through previous discussions with the RMO. There are two major types of transfer schedules, **periodic** and **perpetual**. Periodic records transfer takes place at regular intervals, often annually, toward the end of a fiscal year. With perpetual transfer, offices transfer their records to the storage facility whenever they become inactive. This method generally works well with case files but not with routine ongoing records series. Periodic transfer is often preferable, particularly in larger organizations, because it avoids a flood of records coming into the facility at the same time; and though some series may be split, the majority of reference will be to the active files. Individual offices can have specific dates assigned for review and transfer of records series (Highway Dept./mid-September; Police Dept./mid-October...).

## **Delivery:**

As part of the transfer procedure, select the most appropriate method of transfer. Individual units can deliver directly to the facility or to designated pick-up points. If boxes will be transferred from one building to another, include procedures protecting them from unauthorized access and extreme weather conditions. Good communication between units transferring records and the storage facility minimizes misplacement of boxes.

## **Archival Records:**

The transfer form accompanying transferred records will indicate which records are archival. Policies and procedures concerning these records series should be part of the records management manual and facility staff should be prepared to store these records separately from others (See *Fundamentals of Archival Records*, State Archives TIS #40). They will have special housing needs, such as acid-free folders and boxes, and require adequate environmental controls. (See *Preservation of Paper Records*, State Archives TIS #34).

## **Preparation of Records:**

After units earmark records series for transfer and schedule their delivery with records management staff, they can box up the records. Note that:

- Offices request record center cartons [10"x12"x15"] from RMO,
- Individual records series boxed together, (Adjustable follow blocks made of acid-free corrugated board prevent bending and shifting of folders.)
- One records series per box, and
- One disposal date per box.

Not observing the last two directions greatly increases the possibility of destroying the wrong records, and threatens file integrity, security, access and retrieval.

Remember to remove manila folders from hanging folders, leaving the latter in file cabinets for active file use. Hanging folders are expensive, do not fit properly in standard record center cartons, and take up space. They also make it difficult to shred and recycle records during destruction. For the same reasons, if some files are in binders, remove them and leave the binders for use in the office. With *permanent records*, other items to remove are rubber bands, staples, paper clips, and adhesive tapes. These chemically react with paper and over time will leave sulphur, rust, and adhesive stains on the files. They often cause bending and paper tears as well.

Most files will be letter-size and fit easily across the record center carton's 12" dimension, one behind the other. However, if some or most files in a box are legal-size, these should not be folded and all files in that box should be placed across the 15" dimension, one behind the other. When finished, each box should be almost full with just enough space to comfortably look at folder labels and retrieve those requested. Full boxes weigh approximately 30 pounds, so, to avoid back injuries and expedite transfer, have proper equipment, such as carts, available for moving cartons.

All boxes should have labels supplied to units by the records management staff. They should be easy to read and contain fields (headings) for the:

- transferring unit (coding can ensure confidentiality),
- box number (#4 of 6), and
- locator number (assigned later by the records management staff).

The less information on the **label**, the greater the security of the records. Conversely, the more thorough the content information on the **transfer form**, the greater the efficiency of the transfer process and future retrieval.

### **Transfer Form:**

The transfer form, like cartons, should be provided by the records management staff for consistency. Duplication will allow one copy for the office transferring records, one for the storage area file, one for placement within the box, and one for a chronological disposition date file. The records center staff should sign the transferring unit's copy once a box is processed (and locator number assigned), then return it as a receipt. In addition, the form can serve the transferring unit as a reference source when requesting files from the storage facility. The facility's copy can be used for inventory control.

The form (forms not included in electronic version) should include the following information about the transferred files:

- Date of Transfer [11/05/90]
- Unit Name/Code [Highway Dept./07]
- Box Number [#1 of 5]
- Transfer List I.D. Number [#850]
- Media [paper]
- Records Series Title [Traffic Safety Survey File]
- Records Series Description [forms, accident rpts, court rcds, plans]
- Records Series Dates [1990]
- Schedule (MU-1) Item # [624]
- Retention [6 years]
- Date of Destruction [1997]
- Confidential [No]
- Signature: Unit Staff [Ronnie Rhodes]
- Locator Number [05-31, ROW-SPACE]
- Signature: Facility [Sandy Stores]
- Date of Receipt [11/06/92]

Clear instructions for completing the transfer form and for distribution of copies should be included with the forms. The forms should also be included in the records management manual, as should the entire transfer process, from scheduling and preparation of boxing records to placement on shelves. This practice will promote consistency and efficient workflow.

## **Accessioning**

### **Initial Steps:**

Accessioning refers to the process of receiving transferred records and officially adding them to the storage area collection. The RMO might take unit liaisons through the storage area to show how the entire accessioning process works. Many governments find it advantageous to send the transfer forms to the storage area prior to arrival of the records. Records management staff have the opportunity to make sure lists are complete and adequate shelf space is available. When transferred files arrive, staff should first ascertain whether all boxes scheduled for delivery have come. If any boxes are missing, staff should quickly determine their location and place with the others from the same shipment. Staff should then check the content of each box against the relevant transfer form. If there is any discrepancy in content, the facility staff should immediately notify the transferring unit and work with it to resolve the problem.

Some storage facilities occasionally receive additional files from a transferring unit/office *after* related files in the same records series are accessioned and shelved. This practice should be discouraged and addressed in the records management manual. Instructions should state clearly that interfiling can take place only if adequate space exists in a box; otherwise files will be returned to the transferring office. Interfiling is also time consuming for staff and may not be possible regardless of box space.

### **Space Assignment:**

Once boxes are checked and approved, they are ready to receive a locator number (described later in the text under **Locator Systems**). The number should then be placed on the box label and the transfer form. After signing the form, the person accessioning should send a copy back to the transferring unit as a receipt.

It is crucial to maintain an inventory of space assignments whether online, hard copy, or both. As boxes are removed from shelves for disposal, their locator numbers should be added to the inventory of available spaces, and as incoming boxes are placed on shelves, their locator numbers should be removed from the list of open space assignments.

One way of keeping a manual inventory is to place vacant numbers on index cards, filing them numerically. As boxes are placed on shelves the cards with the assigned locator numbers are pulled from the file and fastened to the corresponding boxes. When boxes are removed for disposal, their cards are pulled off and placed back numerically in the card file.

Another method is to list in sequence the row numbers, one row per page. As locator numbers are assigned in that row, the numbers are checked in pencil. When they become vacant, the checks are erased.

Assignment of locator numbers should be random and based on availability. As long as there is access through locator numbers, there is no need to keep **all** boxes from one unit physically together. This practice is generally inefficient, wasteful of space, and difficult to maintain as boxes come in and go out. If possible, however, store individual shipments together. After

tracking record activity for awhile, it might be advantageous to place records with low retrieval needs and/or longest retention on top or bottom shelves since these are hardest to access.

### Inventory Control/Tracking:

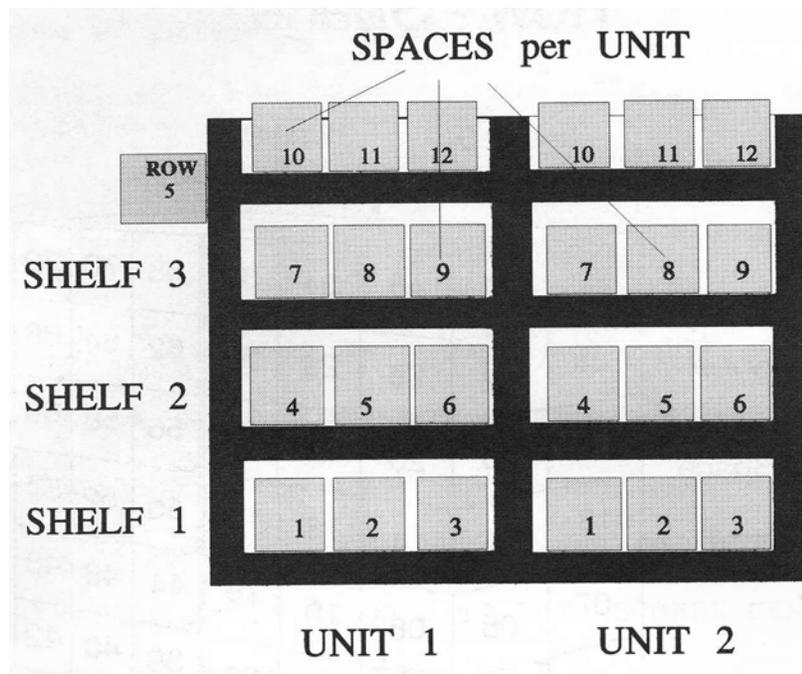
In addition to keeping a locator number inventory, local governments should also keep a file in which data from the transfer forms are entered for purposes of tracking, accessing, and reporting. If a local government is computerized, it is possible to design a data base to contain all fields (headings) on the form (date of transfer, records series title, disposition date, etc.) sort by fields (e.g., disposition date, locator number) and search online for specific records. Regardless of automation capability, the facility should keep original transfer forms in a tickler file arranged for quick access - for example, alphabetical by unit and chronological by date of transfer within each unit section.

### Locator Systems

Without a system for arranging and locating transferred records, the storage facility will not function well. Once a system is in place, however, it is very difficult to change it; therefore, setting up a locator system should be well thought out before implementing.

Common locator systems use two or more of the following elements in their space assignments:

- ROW - Each side of a bay
- SHELF - Unit subdivisions
- UNIT - Vertical section of a row
- SPACE - Shelf subdivisions

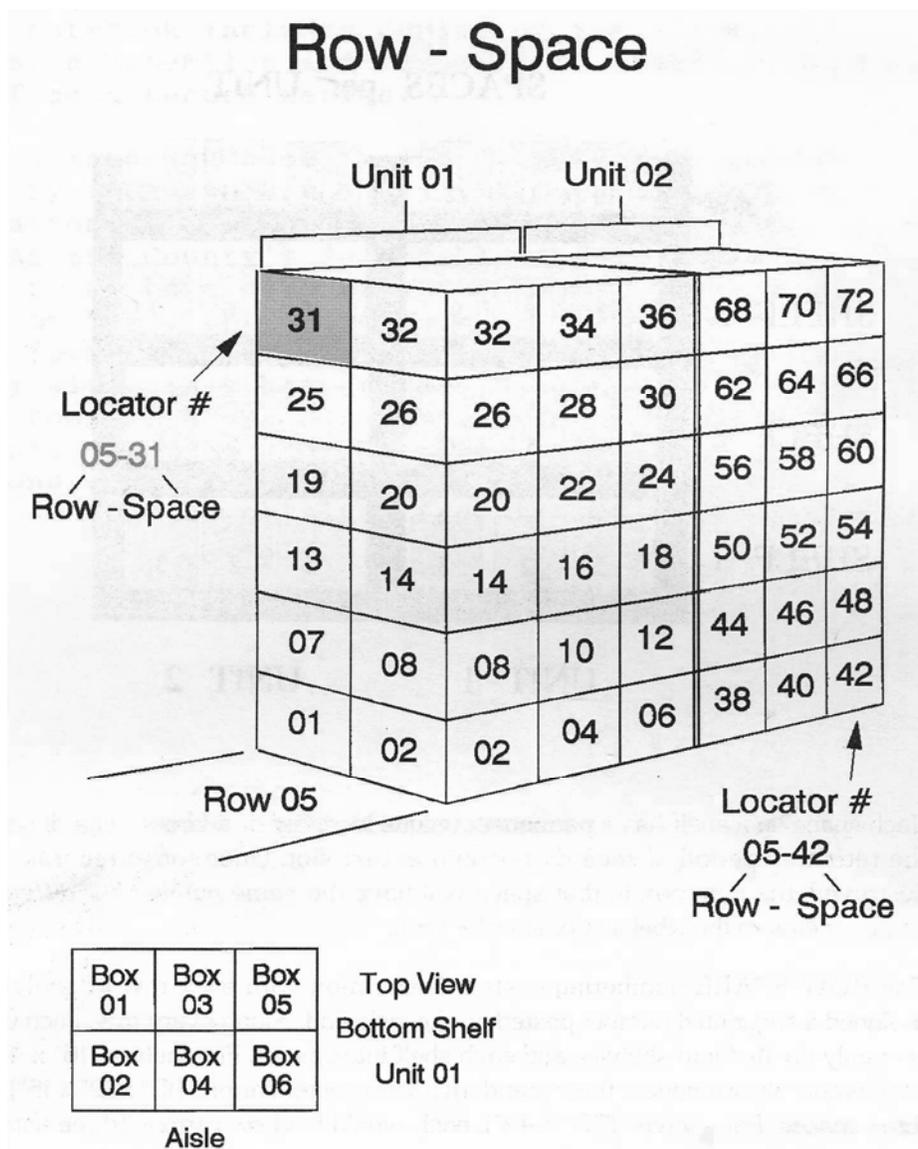


Each space on a shelf has a **permanent unique identifier** or **address**, regardless of the retention

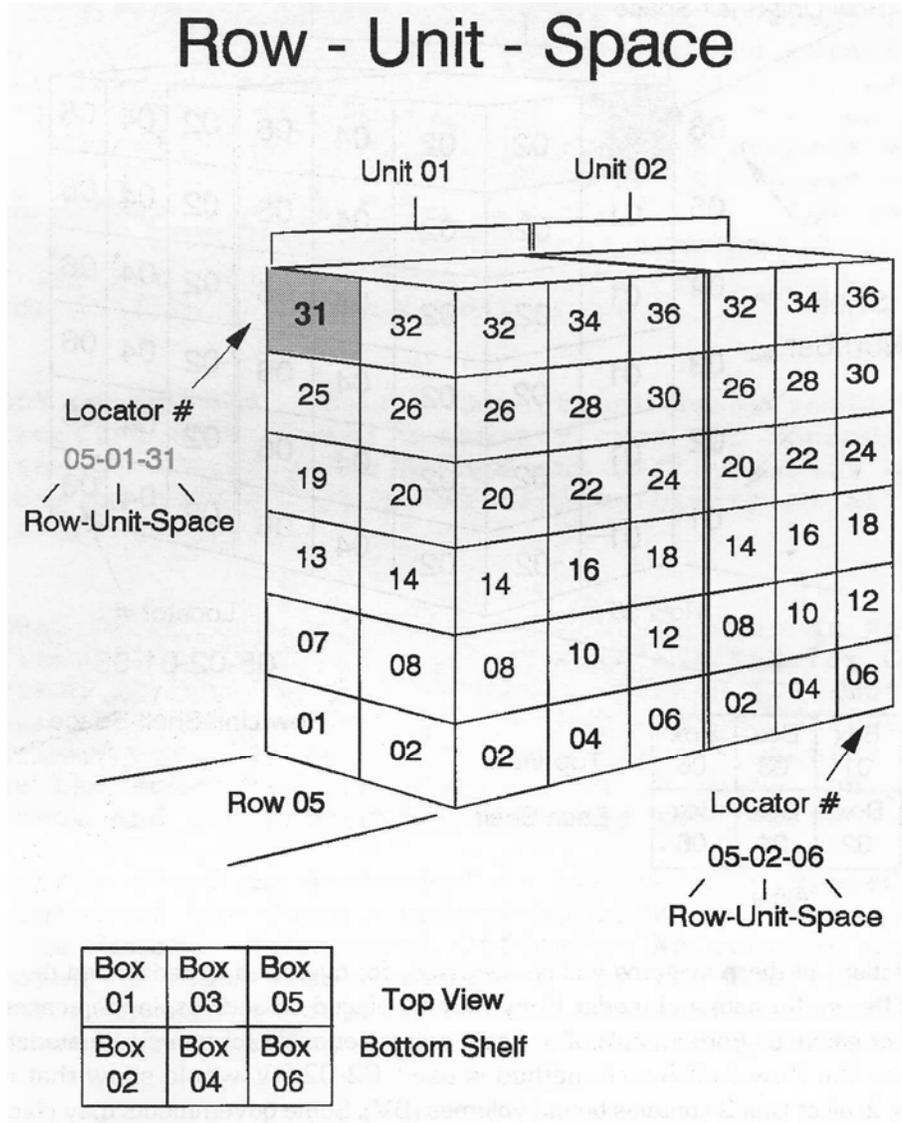
period of records residing in that slot. Once those records are destroyed, the next box in that space will have the same number but different content notes on the label and/or transfer form.

The ROW-SPACE numbering system is common with each row of shelving assigned a sequential number posted on the aisle end. Along every row, each unit is evenly divided into shelves, and each shelf into spaces. For shelves (16" x 42") each would accommodate three standard record center cartons (10" x 12" x 15"), or **three spaces**. For shelves (32" x 42"), each would hold six cartons (three across and two deep), or **six spaces**.

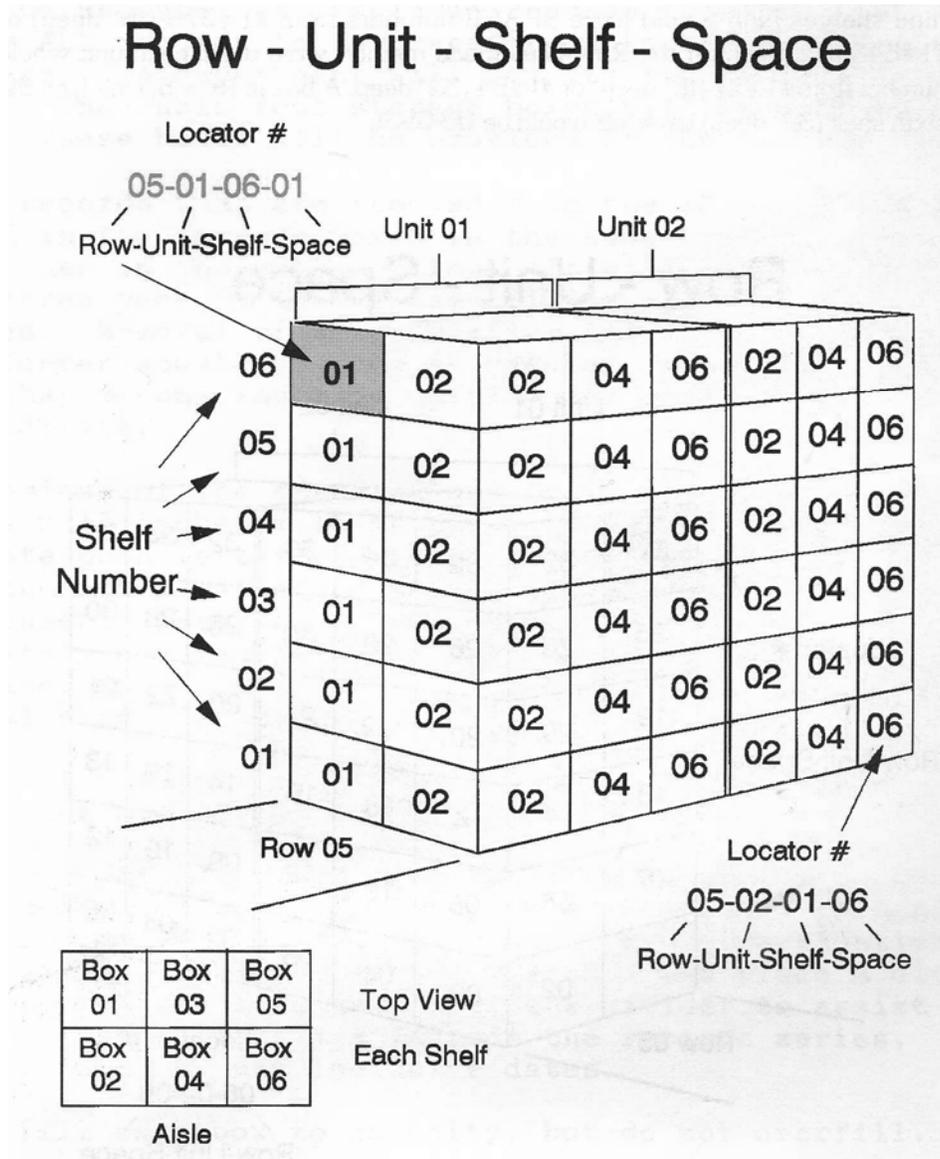
Thus, if each unit of a row has six shelves, it would have 18 spaces (16" depth) or 36 spaces (32" depth). If the row has five units, the spaces would number from #1-#90 (16" depth) or #1-#180 (32" depth). The locator number would combine the row and space number: 05-031.



For other governments the ROW-UNIT-SPACE or ROW-UNIT-SHELF-SPACE numbering method may work better. They often function well in larger facilities with long rows and several shelves. For example, a row with 10 units across and nine shelves high would have SPACE numbers from #1-#270 (16" deep) or #1-#540 (32" deep). If the **Row-Unit-Space** method were used, each unit would number from #1-#27 (16" deep) or #1-#54 (32" deep). A box in Row 5, Unit 1, on the sixth shelf (32" deep) back left would be 05-01-31.



If the **Row-Unit-Shelf-Space** method were used in the same situation the locator number would be 05-01-06-1.



Variations of these systems will be necessary for oversized materials and those of different formats and media. They may be placed on shelves, in map cases, and/or cabinets. For example, if a whole unit is set aside for oversize materials where the Row-Unit-Space method is used, 02-02-BV would show that in Row 2, all of Unit 2 contains bound volumes (BV). Some governments may place all oversized materials in a separate area of the facility. Cabinets holding microfilmed records or map cases housing blueprints and maps will need separate locator systems, for example:

M03-05-76 (Microfilm, Cabinet 3, Drawer 5, Roll 76)

B02-08-05 (Blueprint, Map Case 2, Drawer 8, 5th from top)

As long as the locator systems have numbers/codes pinpointing space addresses and methods are consistent, access and retrieval of records should flow smoothly.

## ***Access/Retrieval***

Quick access and efficient retrieval of their records will be the government staff's overriding concerns and, therefore, crucial factors in the success of an inactive records storage operation. Before filling records requests, outline policies and procedures precisely in the manual, create and distribute relevant forms, draw up a list of authorized personnel from each transferring unit, and educate facility staff in their role of carrying out records retrieval.

As discussed in *Developing an Inactive Records Storage Facility*, State Archives' TIS #48, the actual storage area, whether in-house or off-site, should be accessible to a limited number of staff. Doors should have locks and the few keys made assigned to relevant records management staff. If a commercial site is used, all requests should go through designated staff to protect records from unauthorized access.

To examine transferred files, users should fill out a records request form, obtain an authorized signature, and send the original to the storage site. It is best for the facility operations to receive completed request forms in advance (via mail, fax, or by hand), rather than to take information over the telephone. This prevents later misunderstandings about requested materials, authorization, and confidentiality. It also allows preparation time for facility staff to review requests, input data, arrange work schedules, and access and retrieve the files. The records are then ready for either viewing at the facility if it has a reference area, or transmission to the requesting unit. For storage centers located off-site, a fax machine would expedite the requests, while discouraging phone use.

The *records request form* should contain the following fields (headings):

- Date of Request
- Requestor's Name
- Unit/Unit Phone Number
- Authorized Signature (Unit)
- Locator Number
- Records Series Title
- Files Requested (Folder/Dates...)
- Method of Request (mail,fax,...)
- Retrieved By (Signature):
- Date Charged Out
- Date Due
- Date Returned
- Refiled By (Signature):
- Records Not Found
- Duplication Requested (if applicable).

Several copies of the records request form are necessary for:

- Transferring unit - accompanies requested files to document this action
- Records management staff - supplies data to enter online, when applicable, for tracking records and producing reports
- Chronological by due date tickler file to facilitate calls to the unit asking for the return of files to storage
- Charge-out - when removing records, replace with this copy and when records return, remove the form from the box.
- Records series file - analyze use.

To speed up retrieval, the charge-out copy can be placed in a reusable, brightly colored charge-out folder, quickly indicating the refiling location. Annual review of the records series title file reveals which series are requested, how often, and frequently suggests changes in agency retention and transfer scheduling.

Unless the entire content is needed, individual folders rather than whole boxes should be charged out to unit staff. This will ensure file integrity, security, and confidentiality. The request form should be sent with the files to notify requesters when the files are due back in the facility. When the RMO determines a realistic turnaround time for filling records requests, staffing and action time need consideration. Once established, the interval should be honored and included in the policies and procedures.

If charged out files are not returned, facility staff should call the requester as a reminder, using the tickler file described. If more time is needed and procedures allow, extend the date by one or two weeks making sure to update all relevant files. The normal charge-out period is two weeks. Permitting longer periods increases the likelihood of misplaced records and "no returns." If preferred, a copy of the request form/charge-out card can be mailed to the requester along with a form letter describing return and extended loan procedures.

## ***Reference Services***

If a local government is fortunate enough to have the work area, staff, and time to provide reference services, these services should be detailed in the records management manual. The level of reference services a facility offers is determined by budget, user needs, and staffing. The layout of the reference area should include tables arranged to allow staff a view of users and files and to permit dialogue if questions arise. Printed guidelines and rules should be handed out to each user. A visitor's log or registration card will document who comes to the center, at what time, and for what materials. Both the registration log and the reference request forms further document usage patterns, and record activity, and validate the storage facility's existence.

One of the major benefits of having a reference area in the storage facility is that files needing only a glance never have to leave the area. This is true of records needing several days study as well, if the records management staff can provide duplication services. In these cases, a space for indicating duplication of records should be included on the reference request form.

The facility may also provide services relating to records series on microfilm or microfiche. Having reader/printers within the reference area benefits records control in the same manner as the photocopier or a fax machine - records never have to leave the reference area. Whether the records management staff does the actual duplication or the user, the hours services are available need to be communicated to all staff.

Additional services might include pickup and delivery of requested materials by an off-site facility; records destruction; inventory and usage reports to units. These services should also be publicized and stated in the records management manual.

## ***Disposition***

In most cases other than permanent records, disposition of records refers to their physical destruction. Agreement to destroy files should come from the originating unit via authorization forms. Disposal dates on box labels and transfer forms are the facility's guide to scheduling review and disposal of records. The facility should maintain a chronological file of these dates to check routinely. As records are accessioned, the destruction date can be placed in this file. If the data is entered online from the transfer forms, the disposal date file can be a simple matter of sorting that particular heading chronologically in ascending order and printing it at regular intervals.

There are factors, however, that can extend disposal dates, namely pending lawsuits, hearings, merger negotiations, audits, and changes in laws and regulations. On the other hand, keeping records too long without valid reasons can lead to legal problems as well. Therefore, it is crucial to involve the relevant office or unit in the review process and obtain its authorization for records destruction.

## **Destruction Authorization Form:**

The records management manual should include a sample **records destruction authorization form** (see Appendices). While reviewing the designated records, the facility manager should complete the authorization form and then send it on to the unit for records destruction approval. The authorization form should include the following fields (headings):

- Records Title
- Records Description
- Locator Number
- Records Dates
- Records Volume
- Retention Schedule Item #
- Signature (Unit)
- Signature (RMO).

If the following fields are added, there is no need to create a separate form for *records destruction*. The one form can suffice for both authorization and destruction. It should include:

- Date/Place Records Destroyed
- Method of Destruction
- Signature of Witness
- Signature of Person Destroying Records.

If the originating unit wishes to extend the disposal date of records, it should provide a written explanation on the form and with the RMO select the extended disposition date and update files. Local governments may wish to send another copy to legal staff and the Records Advisory Board in case they are aware of litigations unknown to the affected unit.

### **Pre-destruction:**

For those records approved for destruction, box labels, content, and transfer forms should be checked again to prevent destruction of the wrong records. Locator numbers should be documented, records pulled, boxes placed in a designated staging area prior to disposal, appropriate files updated, and a time set up for destruction. If confidential records make up some of the files listed for destruction, they should be isolated on separate shelves or pallets in the disposal staging area. Their method of destruction (e.g., sealed box pulping) will often differ from that of other records and their confidentiality must be upheld. (See *Destruction of Records*, State Archives TIS #38.) Before records destruction, a local government needs to determine the:

- Method
- Equipment
- Place (in-house or commercial), and
- Costs.

Relevant factors to consider are the volume, format, paper composition, and size of records.

In addition, it would be prudent to explore the possibilities - what equipment is available for rental and are skilled operators required? What services do local recycling plants cover and what are the costs? What methods are offices in the same building using? What are the space, staffing, and electrical needs if shredding is carried out in-house? What safety measures are necessary? If done internally, how are shredded records removed from the building and by whom? What are local environmental restrictions? Once a government has thoroughly examined all the choices, asked all the questions, and decided on the appropriate method(s), policies and procedures should be written and placed in the manual and, if applicable, contracts drawn up.

### **Destruction:**

There are several methods available for records destruction.

**Shredding:** Shredder models vary both in size and types of cuts. Some produce vertical strips from 1/32" to 1". They are less expensive but enable document reconstruction. Other models produce crosscuts (lengthwise and widthwise). Document reconstruction is impossible, security is strengthened, and wastebaskets can hold 20 times more than with other models. However, the

process is slower and the model is more expensive. Other shredders produce rotary cuts and are referred to as disintegrators. They produce fine particles and are excellent for high volume and top security. Another plus with shredders is that the shredded documents are then recyclable.

**Recycling:** If records are not confidential, this is a good method since there are so many commercial services available at reasonable prices. Whole paper is normally a more valuable recycled commodity than shredded paper.

**Bonded Service:** This allows for pickup of records and destruction. The local government should include within the contract permission for staff to accompany the vendor and witness the entire process without prior notice.

**Maceration:** This process involves chemical destruction to soften paper and destroy writing. In most cases the documents are then pulverized.

**Pulping:** In this method water is added to the documents, which are then forced through cutters and screens. The water is then removed from the pulp and the pulp thrown away.

**Incineration:** This was once the method of choice but there are major drawbacks. It creates pollution and waste disposal problems. In addition, partial or whole records can be blown out of the incinerator's stack.

**Sale:** Some organizations may be able to sell non-confidential records, shredded or whole, to paper salvage companies. It is advisable, however, to fully examine the whole process from pickup to recycling.

### **Post-destruction:**

After the records are destroyed, the locator numbers must be added to the register of available space assignments. All files, whether online or in hard copy, should be updated to reflect which records were destroyed, destruction dates and methods. Periodically, a list of destroyed records should be generated for facility operations reports. The completed authorization/destruction form needs to remain in the records manager's files for legal documentation of destroyed records, and a copy sent to the relevant unit for record keeping. The State Archives strongly recommends maintaining a permanent list of destroyed records as defense in litigation or audit.

### ***Reporting***

Within each stage of inactive records management, it is important to document activities. If relevant data is maintained, reports can be generated verifying holdings and analyzing activities. Through these products the facility can justify present needs, improve operations, make more informed decisions regarding future directions, and validate its existence.

Activity reports often contain data for actions such as the number of reference requests received by the facility, or the number of visitors researching the records. They can show the number of

cubic feet of records accessioned and the volume destroyed. Reports can be general, covering all actions or they can focus on a specific activity such as microfilm records series usage. They can include data from a 12- month span, or monthly, or quarterly. They can list all the stored records from a particular unit and their reference and disposal activities. The basis of the report should come from the RMO's perspective of what would help operations of the facility as well as requests from units and government administrators.

Analyses of the activities will clearly show strengths and weaknesses of policies and procedures, and will give credence to actions the records manager will want to take toward improving workflow. Activity analysis can show which records series are the most active, what locator numbers are available, what records are missing or charged out, what times of the year records are requested most, and what units make the most requests. Annual analysis works well, as do times when procedural changes are indicated.

Clearly, computerizing all information from initial transfer forms through to final disposition forms is the best course of action. The ability to manipulate the data for any type of report or analysis is optimal, the time devoted to maintaining data bases is minimal, staff time devoted to retrieval of data is drastically cut, inventory control is strengthened, and the need for many of the paper files discussed is eliminated.

## ***Automation***

### **Selection:**

There are currently several commercial software packages designed for tracking large volumes of records and analyzing costs. However, though many of these packages are modest in price, several cost thousands of dollars. Therefore, when deciding on automation, ask the software vendors for demo disks, talk with colleagues who have or are presently using specific packages, and consider whether a package can be developed in-house. If deciding on this latter approach, try to gauge continuing maintenance and upgrading costs. A staff member familiar with the government's automation, may be able to customize standard data base packages to meet records management needs at minimum cost. The following steps may help during the process of making automation decisions:

- Analyze records management policies and procedures.
- List both immediate and long-term goals.
- List all the reports the system should produce.
- List specific information to track (e.g., disposition dates).
- Explore the various software packages.
  - Examine vendors:
    - How long have they existed?
    - How stable are they financially?
    - How many systems have they installed?
    - What kind of support do they offer?

- Develop criteria to:
  - Determine costs (hardware/software/training/support/maintenance).
  - Discuss whether the situation warrants a consultant.
  - Evaluate commercial packages vs. in-house development.
  - Decide placement of computer(s).
  - Choose who will enter and check data, and produce reports.
  - Decide who can access the system (write, read only).
  - Set up a conversion procedure schedule (paper-based to electronic).
  - Agree on how to educate users on the new procedures.

## **Design:**

There are specific concerns to discuss and agree upon before selecting or developing a records management data base: The number and nature of records management functions to include; the number and design of reports; searching capabilities: keyword, or subject headings; authority files for consistency in entries; accuracy checks: warning messages when deleting, error messages for improper coding; security measures such as READ ONLY configuration for staff viewing but not inputting data and limited access to data - a) records management staff only, b) unit staff to only their records.

## **Products:**

**Reports** are important for justifying management decisions. They can show an increase in usage and the need for more staff. They can help market the records management program and storage facility to administrators and staff by tracking records activity and demonstrating efficient procedures. They can measure staff productivity and inform in organizational planning discussions.

**Indexes** are extremely useful and automation will allow quick production and application. They can be designed to list locator numbers available, records series titles requested, records series ready for disposal review, and records destroyed.

## **Activities:**

**Tracking** and inventory control is considerably easier online because of updating, sorting, and reporting capabilities. Some computer packages can also produce bar code labels. Bar coding greatly reduces data entry errors, controls circulation and allows quicker shelf reading during the inventory process. If a government considers this possibility, equipment usually includes labels, a scanning wand, a portable data-collection device, cable interface, and a software program to upload the data to the data base. Bar coding is most useful when records are stored in large or multiple locations and are frequently referenced and circulated. Bar coding can be part of the discussions with other governments and with vendors during the automation selection process.

**Security** measures, in addition to READ ONLY and limited access design, should include passwords, log on procedures, regular execution of files backup, and transfer of data to disk, diskettes, or tapes. These transferred files should be stored separately from the computer area.

Ideally, two staff members should be able to backup and input data in case one is absent. Policies related to these security measures should be included in the records management manual.

## ***Equipment/Supplies***

Having the proper equipment for storing inactive records and suitable supplies for housing them is yet another key to successful management.

**Shelving** should be constructed of 18-gauge steel and dimensions of the shelves ideally 16" x 42" (three boxes across), or 32" x 42" (three boxes across, two deep). The 15" and 30" depths are sometimes less costly but the deeper shelves prevent box overhang. The units should be reinforced with nuts, bolts, and lateral braces and anchored to the floor. Shelving can be placed back to back to maximize storage space.

If limited space and large volume of records necessitate more than four shelves per unit, a **platform ladder** is advisable. OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) has published information on the acceptable standards. Having side handrails, a platform for placing retrieved boxes, and spring wheels shorten retrieval time and lessen the chance of accidents. Before purchase, check facility aisle widths against that of the ladder to ensure mobility up and down rows and around corners.

If any of the transferred files are oversized, particularly those with permanent retention, they should be stored flat. Both archival quality boxes and **map cases** would be appropriate. There are several styles and sizes available. Microfilm or microfiche records also benefit from special housing. There are many types of **cabinets** and choice often depends on costs, dimensions, and volume of records.

**Carts** are another type of equipment necessary for transporting retrieved records to and from their shelf location. They normally have two shelves spaced to allow standard cartons on each and are long enough to fit two or three boxes per shelf. Handles and casters make it easier to navigate. The height of 32" seems best for the comfort of users. With large volumes of records, **pallets** are preferable, particularly if the storage area has or is near a loading dock. Pallets and **dollies** are handy, also, when accessioning or disposing records.

If the facility has areas for accessioning, researching, and disposing records, **furniture** should include desks, chairs and tables. If data entry goes on there as well, there should be proper furniture for the computer/printer workstation.

Standard record center **cartons** (10" x 12" x 15") are readily available and inexpensive, particularly when purchased in quantity. Anything larger, such as 24" or 30", are unwieldy and make arrangement and retrieval very difficult. For permanent/archival records housing there are acid-free and lignin-free containers and folders from archival supplies vendors. They are more costly but durable and protective. Alternatives to map cases and cabinets are archival **flat boxes** and **tubes** for oversized ledgers, blueprints, drawings, and photographs. There are also boxes available for other media such as negatives, microfilm, microfiche, and videotapes. **Acid-free**

**follow blocks** of corrugated board are available from archival supplies vendors. They have several striations so that they can adjust to keep enclosed files upright and secure.

Box labels and forms will feature prominently in facility operations and therefore should be carefully designed. Checking with other governments, with regional advisory officers, and with vendors will allow a local government to make an informed decision before production and purchase.

### ***Facility Maintenance***

The records manager should work with the building maintenance staff to set up a routine cleaning schedule for the records storage area. This would include vacuuming, use of dust filters, and repainting when necessary. Occasionally, records management staff will need to dust shelves and boxes in the permanent/archival records area.

## **Disaster Planning**

Included within the records management program plan should be a section on disaster preparedness and recovery. Procedures for emergencies such as fire, flooding, and theft should also be clearly delineated in the records management manual. For example, if a flood occurs in the storage area over a weekend and the RMO is out of town, who is the next person to notify and at what telephone number, who has keys, where are the extra tables and the electric fans? During a fire, how will staff know the location within the facility of fire extinguishers? Where will copies of the plan and of phone trees be located?

Because of changes in staff and organization, the plan will need to be updated regularly.

## **Costs**

When budget planning or making changes to original policies and procedures, the RMO may want to keep function costs separate. These would include supplies, reference work, equipment, retrieval and refiling, records disposal, producing and distributing reports, and storage costs. With the statistics from activity analysis to supplement the cost data, tangible ways to reduce costs would emerge.

## **Marketing**

Once the inactive records storage area is operating, an open house or tours could be scheduled and interesting records could be displayed. Personal contact with each unit would encourage participation in transferal of records. It may be advantageous to distribute the records management manuals at a scheduled staff meeting. The whys and wherefores of policies and procedures can be briefly outlined by the RMO and reinforced by top local government officials. Providing the staff a chance to ask questions and voice concerns might increase acceptance of storage operations and the whole records management program.

In addition, posters and flyers could advertise the reference services offered by the records management staff.

## **Program Review**

Once a year, the records management staff should sit down with unit representatives, government administrators, and the Records Advisory Board to review inactive records storage and relevant operations. This would be the time to have analytical reports to document successes, as well as areas needing improvement. Any changes in policies or procedures after the review would be reflected in the update of the records management manual. With good planning, regular input from government staff, routine analysis of facility holdings and activities, steady use of a

records management manual, and annual program reviews, an inactive records storage operation will be well on the road to success.

## **For More Information and Assistance**

The State Archives provides records management services to local governments including technical advice and assistance, publications, training and presentations, and consultations with local governments concerning records and information management issues. The State Archives has [regional offices](#) throughout the State; each office has an experienced records specialist who can visit local governments and provide on-the-spot advice. These services are supported by the Local Government Records Management Improvement Fund. For further information, contact your regional office or the following:

Government Records Services  
State Archives  
State Education Department  
9A47 Cultural Education Center  
Albany, New York 12230  
(518) 474-6926

## Suggested Readings

ARMA Standards Program. Guidelines. *Records Center Operations*, 3rd ed. Prairie Village KS:Association of Records Managers and Administrators, Inc., 1986.

Diamond, Susan Z., *Records Management: Policies, Practices, Technologies*, 2nd ed., New York:AMACOM, 1991

Johnson, Mina M. and Norman F. Kallaus, *Records Management*, 3rd ed., Cincinnati:South-Western Publishing Co., 1982.

Maedke, Wilmer O., Mary F. Robek, and Gerald F. Brown, *Information and Records Management*, 2nd ed., Encino,California:Glencoe Publishing Company, 1981.

Penn, Ira, Anne Morddel, Gail Pennix, and Kelvin Smith, *Records Management Handbook*, Brookfield, Vermont:Ashgate Publishing Company, 1992.

Ricks, Betty R. and Ann J. Swafford, Kay F. Gow. *Information and Image Management: A A Records Systems Approach*, 3rd ed., Cincinnati:South-Western Publishing Co., 1992.

### **State Archives and Records Administration Local Government Records Technical Information Series**

The following publications provide guidance in managing inactive records and are free upon request from the State Archives. They include:

- #24 *Guidelines for Planning and Conducting a Records Inventory*
- #34 *Preservation of Paper Records*
- #41 *Using Records Retention and Disposition Schedules*
- #42 *Guidelines for Off Site Storage of Inactive Local Government Records*
- #43 *Guidelines for Planning Local Government Records Program*
- #48 *Development of an Inactive Records Storage Facility*