

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers for University Employees

1. **What is a Records Retention Schedule?**

A Records Retention Schedule is a records policy for specific records. These schedules provide information as to the record content, format, length of the retention period, official record location and disposition at the end of the record's life cycle. These are sometime referred to as Records Disposition Authority or RDA.

The State requires that the university must use an approved and current Records Schedule for any records it creates. Whether a record is stored at your desk or the State Records Center, a Records Schedule must exist. All Records Schedules must be approved by the Public Records Board and sunset (expire), after ten years. When a Record Schedules sunsets it must be renewed to remain in use.

Records, regardless of where they are stored, in your office or at the State Records Center, **may not be destroyed** without following the appropriate retention schedule prescribed in the RDA.

2. **What is a General Records Schedule?**

General Records Schedules are sets of record series that are common among across the campus or the system, (example: Human Resources).

3. **What is meant by retention period?**

It is the length of time that the university must keep records prior to disposing of them either through destruction or transfer to the UW-Madison Archives. A specific event indicated on the official Records Schedule describes the beginning of the retention period:

CR: Is used when the creation of the record initiates the retention time period. (Example: If a record series existed for ABC Annual Reports, the event might be written as CR + 3 meaning, an ABC Annual Report must be retained for three years after it is created.)

FIS: Is used if the retention time period is initiated by the end of a fiscal year. (Example: record series that exist for annual budgets might be written as FIS + 6 meaning, a budget would have to be retained for six years after the end of the fiscal year.)

Other: Is used if a specific event other than CR or FIS initiates the retention time period. (Example: A record series that exists for a housing relocation program has the event written as "EVT + 5 – Approval Letter for Relocation Plan" meaning, all records in this record series would have to be retained for five years after the official letter from the state was sent approving the relocation plan.)

4. **Who can send records to the State Records Center?**

University employees may submit inventory to the State Records Center by obtaining access through the University Records Officer.

5. **How do I order records storage boxes?**

Record storage boxes are obtained through Material Distribution Services (MDS)
<http://mds.bussvc.wisc.edu/ORDER/default.asp?>

6. How do I retrieve records from the State Records Center?

To retrieve boxes, login and create a request to have the box delivered or call the SRC Order Desk 262-2995.

7. How do I return boxes to the State Records Center?

To send boxes back, login and create a request to have the box pick up or call the SRC Order Desk 262-2995.

8. How do I destroy records in my office containing confidential information?

Please remember, no record can be destroyed in your office, or by the State Records Center, unless in full compliance with the retention period in an existing Records Retention Schedule.

If the full retention period has been met, the records may be sent to the State Records Center for shredding. Follow the guideline below:

Any secure box (example: an empty copy paper box) can be used.

- 1) Box when packed must weigh less than 30 pounds.
- 2) Box must be covered.
- 3) Box must be taped shut.
- 4) Box must be clearly labeled "destroy".

Then call the State Records Center to schedule the pick-up. Tell them how many boxes you have and exactly where they are located, i.e., building, floor, cubicle and column.

9. Can I create the sequence numbers for my boxes of inventory?

Divisions/Versatile Users can assign their own "User Box Number", in any sequence they wish. However, the "Versatile Box Number", or "V-Box Number" as it's commonly called, is a system generated sequential number, based which box is entered into the system first. So V-Box numbers will not always be in sequence. It will depend on how many others are in Versatile entering box inventory at the same time.

10. What are the benefits of storing records at the State Records Center?

There are three primary benefits:

- **Cost Savings:** By making use of storage at the State Records Center, an agency can remove records from high-cost office space and yet maintain custody of and accessibility to its records.
- **Vital Records Protection/Disaster Preparedness:** Vital records and back up electronic data can be stored off-site to be used if the originals are destroyed in a disaster or rendered unusable.
- **Security:** Only individuals authorized by agency records officers are allowed access to records. The agency maintains legal custody of records while stored at the State Records Center.

Additionally, the State Records Center uses a sophisticated inventory database to manage all inactive records. All records are tagged for destruction or transfer at the correct time in their lifecycle.

11. How do I know when my records at the State Records Center will be destroyed?

Twice each year the State Records Center sends each agency's Records Officer its list of records which have met their expiration period. The Records Officer then disseminates division-specific lists to each User with access to the SRC. Each is then responsible to review the list to secure an approval to destroy the records. In some cases, the department will determine the records need to be held, however once records have reached their expiration date, can only be held for four reasons:

- Current litigation;
- Pending litigation or audit;
- Open Records Request under ss. 19.35 Wis. Stats; and/or,
- An updated RDA is under development.

Whether approved for destruction or requested to be held, the department advises the Records Officer who then responds to the State Records Center on behalf of the department/unit.

12. What are my responsibilities for records?

Employees are responsible to:

- Know the difference between records and non-records.
- Know that records consist of all forms of media.
- Know what records belong to the area in which you work.
- Do not destroy any record unless you are following a retention schedule.
- Become familiar with the retention schedules which relate to your area.
- Safeguard confidential and sensitive information appropriately.
- File paper, electronic documents and e-mails according to a consistent filing plan.
- Use the State Records Center for storage when you no longer need more immediate access to records.
- ***Always err on the side of caution.***
- ***Ask for help from the University Records Officer.***