

Destroying Non-Archival Records: Documenting the Destruction of Public Records

Purpose: Provide guidance to state and local government agencies on how to appropriately document the destruction of public records.

Once a public record has met its minimum required retention period it is eligible for **disposition**. Disposition is the final stage in a record's lifecycle in which the record is either transferred for permanent preservation (if designated Archival) or destroyed (if designated Non-Archival). Approved records retention schedules listing the retention and disposition requirements for your agency's records are on Washington State Archives' website at: www.sos.wa.gov/archives/recordsmanagement/.

Washington State Archives strongly recommends that agencies document the destruction of all public records **except for** those whose minimum retention is "Retain until no longer needed for agency business, *then* destroy." While agencies are not required by statute to maintain a destruction log, documenting destruction promotes both transparency and accountability. In the event of a legal or audit challenge, this documentation provides crucial evidence of "defensible disposition," demonstrating that the agency was aware of and compliant with current records retention requirements *at the time that the records were destroyed*.

What information do I need to include in my destruction log?

The log should document the destruction of **electronic** records (emails, digital/video recordings, social media posts, etc.) as well as **paper** records (including books, photos/slides, microfilm, etc.). At a minimum, the log should include:

- Disposition Authority Number (DAN) of the record series being destroyed;
- Title/name of the record series;
- Date range of the records being destroyed (start date to end date); and,
- Date of destruction.

To further enhance transparency and accountability, it is helpful to provide:

- Type and quantity of media being destroyed (e.g., 1,200 emails, one 375-page bound volume, 3 cu. ft. boxes of paper, 10 CDs, etc.);
- Signatures from the person creating the destruction log and the person authorizing the destruction.

Information on appropriate destruction methods for paper and electronic records, as well as sample destruction logs (which state and local government agencies may use and adapt for their own use) are available on our Destruction of Public Records webpage at:

<http://www.sos.wa.gov/archives/RecordsManagement/Destruction-of-Public-Records.aspx>

Please note that destruction logs are to be retained for the life of the agency per DAN GS50-09-06 in the *Local Government Common Records Retention Schedule (CORE)* or DAN GS 11005 in the *State Government General Records Retention Schedule (SGRRS)*.

**Additional advice regarding the management of public records is available from
Washington State Archives:**

**www.sos.wa.gov/archives
recordsmanagement@sos.wa.gov**