

Disaster Preparedness: Are Fire-Proof Safes/Cabinets Required?

Purpose: Provide guidance to state agencies and local government entities on whether they should purchase fire-proof records storage equipment.

NO – There is no requirement to use fire-resistant safes/cabinets to protect records, though they can be used as part of an overall disaster preparedness strategy.

- There is no such thing as a truly fire-proof safe or cabinet. Fire-*resistant* safes/cabinets are rated according to the amount of heat they are able to withstand before failing. If you do choose to purchase a fire-resistant safe/cabinet, make sure that it has an appropriate heat rating for the type of media you plan to store inside of it as some media formats are more susceptible to heat damage than others.
- Fire-resistant safes/cabinets are costly and should only be used in circumstances where that is the best option, such as situations where off-site storage is not available or affordable.
- Before purchasing a fire-resistant item, your agency should consider other measures that may be more cost effective, such as using concrete blocks to create walls around records storage areas, and installing fire-resistant doors and sprinkler systems.

RECOMMENDED ALTERNATIVES:

- For **“Essential” records still under retention** – Create microfilm or digital backup copies of the records and store the backups off-site.
- For **“Archival” records with a long-term retention** – Digitize the paper records or make a secondary copy of the electronic records, then transfer the original archival records to Washington State Archives for early preservation. The records transferred to the Archives act as the offsite backup copy, while the agency continues to manage the electronic copy for the remainder of retention period.
- For **“Archival” records that have met retention** – Transfer the records to Washington State Archives for long-term preservation.

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

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