

Disaster Preparedness: Basics of Preparing for Disasters

Purpose: Provide a high-level overview to state agencies and local government entities on the basics of preparing for disasters.

Information is one of your agency's most important assets, and like other assets it should be protected. Preparing for a disaster before it happens can help mitigate damage to records and data during and after a disaster.

Agencies can prepare for disasters/emergencies by:

1. Creating and maintaining offsite backups of Essential-designated records:
 - Certain records are needed by the agency in order to continue/resume essential functions both during and immediately following disasters/emergencies;
 - These records are flagged as "Essential (for Disaster Recovery)" in the records retention schedules;
 - Backing up Essential-designated records is required per chapter 40.10 RCW;
 - Agencies should regularly review these "Essential" designations and notify the Archives if changes are needed.
2. Including records recovery in the Disaster Preparedness and Response Plan;
3. Maintaining appropriate contact information, equipment, and supplies for recovering records;
4. Ensuring all records and data are stored in dry areas clear of potential hazards such as sewer pipes, which could cause damage;
5. Securing all restricted/confidential records and data to ensure that only those who need access have it;
6. Laying rodent and insect traps in records storage areas and checking them regularly;
7. Reducing the records that have already met their minimum retention requirements by routinely destroying non-archival records and transferring archival records to the Archives for safe keeping.

Washington State Archives helps agencies prepare for disasters affecting records by providing:

- Advice and consultations;
- Documentation of Essential-designated records in records retention schedules;
- Digitization services;
- Inspection and storage of security microfilm backups of records;
- Storage, preservation, and access to archival records.

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

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