

Electronic Records Management: Keep Electronic Records in Electronic Format

Purpose: Provide guidance to state agencies and local government entities on the retention and transfer of electronic records in electronic format.

Do I have to print out my records for retention purposes or to transfer to the Archives?

NO – If the records are already in electronic format (such as emails, electronic calendars, database records, etc.) then the records need to be retained in electronic format.

Do not print out electronic records and then delete the electronic version as a means of retaining the records.

[Preservation of Electronic Records \(WAC 434-662-040\)](#) states in part:

“Electronic records must be retained in electronic format and remain usable, searchable, retrievable and authentic for the length of the designated retention period. Printing and retaining a hard copy is not a substitute for the electronic version unless approved by the applicable records committee.”

Do not print out “Archival” electronic records to transfer to Washington State Archives. These records are to be transferred and preserved in electronic format.

Why printing out electronic records doesn’t work

While the retention and preservation of paper records can be simpler than retaining and preserving electronic records, the retention of a printout of an electronic record doesn’t work because:

1. **Metadata is lost.** Most metadata is not captured in the printing out of electronic records. The electronic record’s metadata is an integral part of the record as it helps prove its authenticity.
2. **Usability is reduced.** The ability to search and use the record is reduced when it is printed out. It is far easier to search through thousands of emails in electronic format than trying to do the same when they are printed out.

Do electronic records need to be kept in their native format?

NO – In fact, in order to preserve electronic records, especially over time, it may be necessary to migrate records to formats better suited for retention and preservation.

However, it is important that any data migration to another electronic format preserves the necessary metadata needed to prove the record’s authenticity.

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

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