

Disaster Preparedness: Selecting Appropriate Records Storage Areas

Purpose: Provide guidance to state agencies and local government entities on what to look for when choosing an area to store paper, print photographs, and analog audio/video records.

What to look for when choosing a storage area:

- **Security** – Good security and the ability to lock or restrict access if needed for records with restricted/confidential information.
- **Temperature** – Cool and dry with airflow and temperature control. Hot temperatures and/or wild temperature fluctuations are harmful to records stored over a long period of time.
- **No Liquids** – Free of water or hazardous liquids contained above and around the area that could leak onto the records. Potential liquid hazards include water/sewer pipes, water tanks, and chemicals stored in adjacent rooms.
- **Air Intake** – Located away from air intake that could bring in smoke, exhaust, chemical fumes, etc.
- **Enclosed** – Fully enclosed and not open to the elements.
- **Low Risk of Disaster** – Located outside of a flood zone or any other area with a high probability of natural disaster.

Other ways to mitigate potential records damage:

- **Metal Shelves** – Fully metal shelving/cabinets don't soak up water and get moldy like wood or pressboard. Wood and plastic can off-gas chemicals, damaging records over time.
- **Boxes Off Ground** – Ensure all boxes are off the ground to avoid water damage and mold from leaks or floods.
- **Insect and Rodent Traps** – Place near records and regularly monitor traps.
- **Regular Monitoring** – Frequently check the records storage area for signs of leaks, mold/mildew, and pest infestations.

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

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