



ELECTRONIC MESSAGES BEST PRACTICE FOR ALL PUBLIC AGENCIES
Date Effective: APRIL 1, 2009

PURPOSE

The purpose of this best practice is to establish a set of statewide recommendations for the retention and disposition of electronic messages created with electronic communication systems (such as electronic mail systems). This best practice is not intended to be a statement of the current ability of public agencies to store, retrieve, and access records. It is a statement of goals and expectations. The realization of such goals and expectations will result in more effective records management.

SCOPE

This best practice applies to all electronic messages created or received by public agencies.

STATEMENT OF AUTHORITY

Pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 317a, 3 V.S.A. § 117, 3 V.S.A. § 218, 3 V.S.A. § 2222, and 3 V.S.A. § 2283b the Vermont State Archives and Records Administration (Office of the Secretary of State) and the Department of Information and Innovation (Agency of Administration) are authorized to establish and promulgate standards, procedures and techniques for the effective management of public records.

STATEMENT OF BENEFITS

Sound records management practices and procedures result in a number of benefits: fulfilling legal mandates, improving access and accountability, reducing costs for the retrieval of records, ensuring the creation and management of accurate and reliable records, and reducing the costs of storing records.

STATEMENT OF RESPONSIBILITY

Maintaining complete and trustworthy records over time is a shared responsibility. Establishing and operating effective recordkeeping systems and practices requires a multidisciplinary approach. Public agencies should make effective use of the necessary range of expertise available throughout the State of Vermont. This includes expertise in archives, records and information management, information technology, business process management, risk management, and law.

CONTACT

Questions about this best practice may be directed to the Vermont State Archivist or Chief Information Officer.



DEFINITIONS

Disposition Order: An order issued by the Commissioner of Buildings and General Services or a predecessor pursuant to 22 V.S.A. § 454 authorizing an agency to destroy a public record provided that certain requirements have been met. Orders were issued between the years 1938 and 2008.

Electronic Communication System: Any system that was specifically designed for sending and receiving messages electronically (e.g. electronic mail systems).

Electronic Message: Any message transmitted or received electronically.

Electronic Recordkeeping System: A computer application that can collect, organize, and categorize records to facilitate their management, preservation, retrieval, use, and disposition.

File Plan: A classification scheme or taxonomy describing different types of records, how they are identified, where they are stored, and how they are indexed for retrieval.

Receipt Data: Information generated by electronic communication systems showing the date and time the message was received and/or acknowledgment of receipt or access by the addressee(s).

Record: Any written or recorded information, regardless of physical form or characteristics, which is produced or acquired in the course of agency business (1 V.S.A. § 317(b)).

Record Schedule: A manual, directive or policy containing descriptions of and instructions for retention, access, management and disposition of records that is approved by the State Archivist pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 317a and 3 V.S.A. § 117.

Recordkeeping System: A system of coordinated policies and procedures that enable records to be collected, organized, and categorized to facilitate their management, including preservation, retrieval, use, and disposition. Systems may be manual or electronic.

Transmission Data: Information generated by electronic communication systems showing the identities of the sender and addressee(s), the date and time the messages were sent, and the file name(s) of any attachments.



ELECTRONIC MESSAGES BEST PRACTICE

- 1) Messages and attachments produced or acquired during the course of agency business are records.**
 - For the purposes of this best practice, records are defined as “any written or recorded information, regardless of physical form or characteristics, which is produced or acquired in the course of agency business.” (1 V.S.A. § 317(b)).

- 2) Messages and attachments created with electronic communication systems should be retained and disposed in accordance with authorized and approved record schedules.**
 - For the purpose of this best practice, a record schedule is “a manual, directive, or policy containing descriptions of and disposition instructions for retention, access, and management” of public records. (3 V.S.A. § 117(a)(5)).
 - Recordkeeping systems should include a records schedule approved by the State Archivist (1 V.S.A. § 317a).

- 3) Retention and disposition of electronic messages depends of the content and context of the specific message.**
 - Specific messages should be treated the same as any other agency record created or received during the normal course of business.

- 4) Records created through electronic communication systems should be fully retrievable and available until retention requirements specified in their respective disposition orders or record schedules have been met.**
 - Records should be easily accessible in the normal course of all business processes.
 - Public records should be searchable and retrievable for reference and secondary uses including audits, legal proceedings, and historical research.
 - Training and user support programs should be available to ensure that users can access and retrieve records.

- 5) Messages and attachments may be converted to an appropriate file format and transferred to an existing recordkeeping system.**
 - Agencies should have policies and procedures that address how their agency will transfer records from their electronic communications systems to existing electronic recordkeeping systems or paper-based recordkeeping systems.
 - Records transferred from an electronic communication system to a recordkeeping system should include all transmission or receipt data.
 - Agencies with electronic recordkeeping systems should transfer records to their system and file according to existing file plans.
 - Agencies with paper-based recordkeeping systems should print file their records and file according to existing file plans.



- 6) Records transferred to a recordkeeping system should be completely removed and deleted from the electronic communication system upon verification that the transfer was successful.**
- Records should be deleted from the message inbox and all deleted messages folders and trash cans.
 - Backup tapes, related recovery records and transmission logs should be retained and disposed in accordance with existing disposition orders or record schedules.
- 7) When messages and attachments are sent to multiple people, the sender should be responsible for maintaining the record, including subsequent responses (threads) until the retention requirement is met. Copies of the messages should be disposed in accordance with approved disposition orders or record schedules.**