

Proper Destruction of Records

Virtually all agencies require the sanction of an official retention schedule prior to the destruction of public records.

Indiana Code 5-15-5.1-14 states:

A public official or agency may not mutilate, destroy, sell, loan, or otherwise dispose of any government record, except under a record retention schedule or with the written consent of the commission [i.e., Indiana Archives and Records Administration].

Record Retention Schedule

A record retention schedule formally describes the contents of a record series and sets rules for its disposition. A record series consists of records that have the same physical form, are arranged under a single filing system, are related to a particular subject, document a particular transaction or are produced by the same activity, and so form an identifiable group.

Destruction Options

When a retention schedule indicates that the records it governs are due to be destroyed, an agency has two options: it can either destroy the records in-house or contact the Records Center, which destroys records as a service to all state agencies. The preferred method of destruction for most records is recycling. According to IC 5-15-5.1-13, though, confidential records must be destroyed in such a manner that they cannot be "read, interpreted or reconstructed." The Records Center can destroy both ordinary and confidential records in the approved fashions.

Calculating When Records are Eligible for Destruction

To calculate the date records are eligible for destruction, start with the date of the latest records and add the time period specified in the retention schedule. Take, for example, General Correspondence (GRADM-4 on the General Retention Schedule), which can be destroyed after three (3) years. If the latest correspondence is December 31, 1987, then the records may be destroyed on January 1, 1991.

Records Destruction Notification Form (SF 16)

To initiate the destruction of records, complete a Records Destruction Notification form. These are available online at forms.IN.gov. As retention schedules grant agencies the authority to destroy certain records after a specified time period, it is not necessary to obtain permission from the Archives and Records Administration each time scheduled records are due for destruction. It is necessary, however, to notify the IARA that the records were destroyed in order to be able to satisfy any later request for an audit trail.

Complete all required entries on the Records Destruction Notification form, especially those that note the dates of the records and the precise date they were destroyed. It is extremely important to use the Record Series Title and Record Series Number exactly as they appear on the retention schedule, since it may be necessary to establish at a later date that the records were destroyed legally. The Destruction Notification must be signed and dated by the agency's records coordinator.

Destruction of Records by the Records Center

To ask the Records Center to destroy records, complete the Records Destruction Notification form as instructed above, and check the box marked "Courtesy destruction." If the records in question are deemed confidential, write "Confidential" in the "method of destruction" blank. Send the completed form to the Records Center. Records Center staff will arrange to pick up the records from the agency.

To prepare records for Records Center destruction, place them in properly labeled one cubic foot boxes. Unless instructed otherwise, it is not necessary to segregate colored paper, file folders, or other material from the files before loading the records into the boxes.

To avoid confusion, all records picked up for destruction by the Records Center staff must have proper box labels. Labels may be obtained from the Forms Distribution Center, Dept. Of Administration. Enter the Record Series number and Record Series Title on the label exactly as they appear on the retention schedule. Use the retention schedule and the dates of the records to calculate the destruction date for the box.

For further information, contact:

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Indianapolis, IN 46204
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Fax: 317-233-1713

State Records Management Division

Amy Robinson 317-232-3285

State Records Center

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Indianapolis, IN 46219
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A Guide to Proper Records Destruction

Indiana Archives and Records Administration