



# Managing essential records in emergencies

## Part 4 of a webinar series on records retention

MDH Center for Public Health Practice  
November 2022





## Records retention webinar series

1. Records and information management
2. Records retention schedule
3. Preserving and disposing of government records
4. **Managing essential records in emergencies**

**Full webinar series:** [www.health.mn.gov](http://www.health.mn.gov); search for “records retention”





## Agenda

- What are essential records?
- Why are they important?
- Protecting essential records
- Retention schedule and disaster plan
- Recovery and protection



## What is an essential record?

- Essential records contain information that is necessary to...
  - ...the operations of government in an emergency created by a disaster
  - ...protect the rights and interests of persons, or to establish and affirm the powers and duties of governments in resuming operations after a disaster
- Essential records are a small part of an organization's total records





## What is a records disaster?

- **Disaster:** Generally considered to be an event beyond the powers of first responders to prevent or control, resulting in loss of life and property.
- **Records disaster:** The loss or unavailability of records or data, which disrupts an organization's functions or results in loss, or threat of loss to rights and assets of the organization or the public.





## Why are essential records important?

- Preparing for disasters and leading public response and relief is a primary government responsibility
- Part of continuity of operations (COOP) planning and response
- Good business practice; good investment



## Types of disasters affecting records

- **Water damage:** Can result in further damage (e.g., mold)
- **Fire damage:** Charred, burned, sooty; usually accompanied by water damage
- **Contamination:** Substances poured onto records; usually accompanied by water damage
- **Unavailability:** Unsafe buildings, etc.

Electronic records are subject to the above, and also **power failure, equipment failure, software problems, hacking, viruses, and human error.**



## How to identify essential records

1. Necessary for emergency response
2. Necessary to resume or continue operations
3. Protect health, safety, property, rights of residents
4. Would require massive resources to reconstruct
5. Document the history of communities and families

Essential records can be in any format.



## Examples of essential records

- Emergency/continuity of operations plan
- Staff contact and assignment information, such as names, addresses, and phone numbers
- Orders of succession and delegations of authority
- Policies, procedures, and systems manuals
- List of credit cardholders to purchase needed supplies
- Maps and building plans
- Employee records, including financial and pay records
- Customer records
- Social Security and retirement records
- Titles, deeds, and contracts
- Licenses and long-term permits





# Retention schedules as a tool to identify essential records

When reviewing your retention schedule, consider:

- What are the consequences if you lose these records?
- What is the cost (time, labor, money) if you must reconstruct these records?
- How rapidly will you need to reconstruct these records before serious damage happens to the operation?
- Can you readily replace these records from another source, agency, office, etc.?
- Are these records already duplicated or replicated in another form?
- If an electronic database: Is the information sufficient to substitute for the original record?





## How to protect essential records

- On site
- Secured on-site storage
- Duplicated and offsite



## Protecting essential records on site

- Keep essential records separate from other records
- Locate the records as close to the door as possible
- Mark their location on a floor plan and put the floor plan in the disaster recovery plan
- Keep out of bottom file drawers





## Protecting essential records in secure on-site storage or duplicated offsite

Secure on-site storage:

- Fire-resistant vault
- Secure file room with protections and security controls

Duplicated and offsite:

- Keep duplicates of essential records at an offsite location





## Essential records protection schedule and plan

- Update alongside the main records schedule
- Identifies:
  - Records series that require protection
  - Office of record, responsible for the record
  - Media on which record is captured
  - Instructions for protection, including method of duplication (if appropriate) and location
  - Frequency to update
  - Total retention as a security copy





# Example: Essential records protection schedule and plan

Department:

Schedule date:

#	Series title	Office	Media	Update cycle or total retention	Protection instructions
1	Accounts payable	Finance	Paper	Daily	Scan. Back up images to tape. Store tapes offsite.
2	Payroll	Finance	Electronic	Monthly	Computer output microfilm (COM). Store security copy at county archives.
3	Critical materials list	Public Works	Paper	Monthly	Microfilm. Security copy at county archives.



## Elements of an essential records disaster plan

- Notifying appropriate staff immediately
- Assessing damage to records
- Assembling records recovery team
- Determining recovery measures
- Recovering or replacing lost information
- Resuming normal business



## Recovering damaged records: Considerations

- Record medium
- Security or access controls
- Costs to recover high-value vs. low-value records
- Expertise needed for recovery efforts

Minnesota Historical Society and disaster preparedness:  
[www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/disaster.php](http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/disaster.php)





## Protecting records

- Physical location:
  - Raise computers above flood level, move away from large windows
  - Move heavy/fragile objects to low shelves
  - Purchase fire-resistant cabinets and vaults
- Offsite protection:
  - Planned dispersal
  - E-vaulting
  - Duplication
- Regular backup:
  - Back up regularly
  - Store at offsite location





## Records disaster recovery

- Incorporate records disaster training into other emergency preparedness activities for **all employees**
- Train **recovery team** to assess nature and extent of records disaster

## Actions during recovery

- Stabilize
- Dry
- Clean
- Store
- Duplicate
- Destroy
- Re-file





## Conclusion

Prevent

Protect

Respond

Recover



## Resources for managing essential records in emergencies

- Minnesota Historical Society: Emergency preparedness and recovery plan: [www.mnhs.org/preserve/conservation/reports/emergencyplan.pdf](http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/conservation/reports/emergencyplan.pdf)
- Council of State Archivists: Emergency preparedness: [www.statearchivists.org/research-resources/emergency-preparedness](http://www.statearchivists.org/research-resources/emergency-preparedness)
- National Archives: Vital records and records disaster mitigation and recovery: [www.archives.gov/records-mgmt/vital-records](http://www.archives.gov/records-mgmt/vital-records)
- Your continuity of operations coordinator or county administrator





**Thank you.**

