

Tracking records

RMS 2.1

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Introduction

1. This standard has been prepared by The National Archives and is one of a series of Records Management Standards for use by all organisations creating or holding public records.
2. Accurate recording of all record movements is essential if information is to be located quickly and efficiently. One of the main reasons why records are misplaced is because record movements are not recorded.
3. Tracking of records within a records management system is required to:
 - enable retrieval of the record
 - monitor usage for the maintenance of systems and security
 - maintain an auditable trail of records transactions, such as registration, classification, access and disposal
4. The success of a records tracking system depends on the people using it and all staff of an organisation should be aware of its importance and be fully acquainted with its operation

1 Scope

- 1.1 This standard is a best practice benchmark for all organisations creating or holding public records.
- 1.2 It provides advice and guidance on the tracking of records at all stages of the information life cycle up to destruction, or transfer to The National Archives or an approved place of deposit.
- 1.3 It covers three distinct areas:
 - physical tracking
 - monitoring usage
 - maintenance of records transactions
- 1.4 It applies to all records - such as paper, microform, film, videotape, sound recordings - except electronic records, which are the subject of a separate standard.

2 Definitions

For the purposes of this standard the following definitions apply:

- 2.1 **Access** the availability of or permission to consult records
- 2.2 **Accountability** the principle that organisations and individuals are required to account to others for their actions. Government departments and agencies must be able to account for their actions to the appropriate regulatory authority
- 2.3 **Appraisal** the process of evaluating an organisation's activities to determine which records should be kept, and for how long, to meet the needs of the organisation, the requirements of Government accountability and the expectations of researchers and other users of the records

- 2.4 **Approved place of deposit** a record office which has been approved for the deposit of public records in accordance with section 4(1) of the Public Records Act 1958
- 2.5 **Bar-coding** the use of a label of printed vertical lines of defined width for use in conjunction with a computer database
- 2.6 **Client manager/Information management consultant (IMC)** an officer of the Public Record Office responsible for giving advice and guidance to a group of government departments and agencies, to provide for the timely and effective appraisal, documentation and accessioning of departmental records
- 2.7 **Computer database** a structured collection of data, which may be manipulated by digital computer to select and sort desired items of information
- 2.8 **Departmental Record Officer (DRO)** the person appointed by a government department or agency as being responsible for the management of the records of that organisation
- 2.9 **Diary cards** index cards kept in chronological sequence containing information on records that enable their location and disposal action to be determined
- 2.10 **Disposal** the implementation of appraisal and review decisions. These comprise the destruction of records and the transfer of selected records to the Public Record Office. They may also include the movement of records from one system to another (for example paper to electronic) or the transfer of custody of records
- 2.11 **Docket books** a series of folders containing forms which record the reference, title and location of a record
- 2.12 **Electronic records** records where the information is recorded in a form that is suitable for retrieval, processing and communication by a digital computer

- 2.13 **Film** transparent plastic coated strip with a light sensitive emulsion, bearing a sequence of images which create the illusion of motion when projected, and carried on an open reel
- 2.14 **Index cards** a series of cards that may be arranged alphabetically for the purpose of facilitating references to names, file titles, etc or numerically for file references
- 2.15 **Location cards** cards designed to record the location of a record, showing reference number, title or description, user of the record and the date on which the record was taken
- 2.16 **Microform** records in the form of microfilm and microfiche, including aperture cards
- 2.17 **Operational area** a unit, division or department within a government department or agency with responsibility for a particular function
- 2.18 **Paper records** records in the form of files, volumes, folders, bundles, maps, plans, charts and so on
- 2.19 **Protective marking** the process of determining security restrictions on records. Previously called 'classification'
- 2.20 **Public Records** records of, or held in, any department of Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom or records of any office, commission or other body or establishment whatsoever under Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, as defined in paragraph 2 of the First Schedule to the Public Records Act 1958. Also records of organisations subsequently included in the table in the above Schedule or of those whose records have since been determined as public records by the Public Record Office
- 2.21 **Public Records Act 1958** Legislation 6 & 7 Eliz. 2, Ch 51
- 2.22 **Record audit/census** complete and accurate listing of records resulting from a survey

- 2.23 **Records transactions** units of business activities with regard to the maintenance of records, including registration, classification, amendment and disposal
- 2.24 **Register** a list of records, usually in simple sequence such as date and reference number, serving as a finding aid to the records
- 2.25 **Registration** the process of records creation and its recording in an appropriate finding aid, such as a register, index, computer database and so on
- 2.26 **Sound recordings** a recording of sound on magnetic tape carried on an open reel or cassette
- 2.27 **Spreadsheet** a computer programme that manipulates tables consisting of rows and columns of cells, and displays them on a screen. The cells contain numerical information and formulae, or text
- 2.28 **Tracking** capturing and maintaining information about the movement, use and transactions of records
- 2.29 **Transfer to The National Archives** transfer for permanent preservation to The National Archives or approved place of deposit
- 2.30 **Transfer/Transit slip** a form recording the movement of records documenting reference number, record description, name of the person transferring the record, name of the person receiving the record and date of movement
- 2.31 **Videotape** magnetic or other tape carrying a series of TV images recorded magnetically, electronically or holographically

3 Responsibilities

- 3.1 Departmental Record Officers are responsible for ensuring that the locations of all records within their control are known at any time.

This is an essential element of their overall responsibility for the records of their organisation from the moment they are created to their ultimate disposal.

They are also responsible for providing information on the use of records of their organisation.

- 3.2 Members of staff of government departments and agencies are responsible for the safe-keeping of all public records which they handle.

This includes being conversant with any system which provides for the tracking of such records.

- 3.3 The National Archives information management consultants are responsible for giving advice to government departments and agencies on the management of their records, including the operation of effective tracking systems.

4 Physical tracking

- 4.1 The physical movement of records should be documented to ensure that each item can always be located when it is required.

- 4.2 Tracking mechanisms should record the following information:

- the item reference number or identifier
- a description of the item (for example the file title)
- the person, position or operational area having possession of the item
- the date of movement

4.3 Systems for monitoring the physical movement of records include:

- location cards
- index cards
- docket books
- diary cards
- transfer or transit slips
- bar-coding
- computer databases (electronic document management systems)
- regular record audits or censuses (preferably once a year)

The system adopted should maintain control on the issue of records, the transfer of records between persons or operational areas, and return of records to their home location for storage. The simple marking of file jackets to indicate to whom the file is being sent is not in itself a sufficient safeguard against files going astray.

Examples of a location card, docket book, diary card, transfer/transit slip and record audit/census form are shown by Figures 1 to 5.

- 4.4 Determining which system is most suitable is a decision which needs to be based on the requirements of the operational area(s) concerned. Where the number of file movements is less than 400 per week, manual systems such as location cards, index cards, docket books, diary cards and transfer slips would suffice. When file movements are over 400 per week, serious consideration of a bar-coding system should be given. The use of computer databases for tracking systems will usually be dictated by similar applications elsewhere in the organisation, as well as their use for combined record tracking systems (see section 7).

5 Monitoring usage

5.1 The tracking of records usage within a records management system is necessary to:

- ensure that only those users with appropriate clearance or permission are performing tasks for which they have been authorised
- keep track of information necessary for the organisation's current business

Figure 4 - Physical tracking: example of a transfer/transit slip

File Transfer Slip	
To: Registry, 1st Floor Selborne House	
Please complete this form when you pass a file to someone else so that Registry can update its computer database	
Please remember that file booked out to you are your responsibility and you must be able to produce them on request.	
File No (include Section or part no where appropriate)	Passed to (individuals name)
From: (Block Capitals) _____	
Date: _____	Telephone No: _____

Figure 5 - Physical tracking: example of a record audit/census form

PERIODIC CHECK **DSR 59**

MOVEMENT OF FILES AND PAPERS

To: Department:

File/Folio No: of (year)

Title/Subject:

was sent to you on:

Please:

- return it to the Registry with this memorandum; or
- confirm that you still hold and wish to retain it; or
- if not with you, say when and to whom you passed it.

Date: Signed:

..... Registry

Building/Room No:

.....

5.3 Systems for monitoring the use of records include

- statistical tables
- spreadsheets
- computer databases

Determining which system should be used is a decision which needs to be based upon the level of usage of the records, the demand for performance management information

and the level of support to the organisation's corporate strategy required by the records management system.

Statistical tables, completed manually, will suffice where these demands are low and the amount of information to be collated is minimal. Spreadsheets are better to cope with large amounts of information. The use of computer databases for monitoring usage will usually be dictated by similar applications elsewhere in the organisation, as well as their use for combined record tracking systems (see section 7).

An example of a form for collecting statistics on usage is shown at Figure 6.

6 Maintaining records transactions

6.1 Records management systems need to provide complete and accurate information on all transactions which occur in relation to a particular record. These include:

- registration
- protective marking
- changes in description, contents and so on
- disposal
- pattern and duration of use
- activity levels

An accurate record of such information will ensure that staff of the organisation are immediately aware of the current position on registered files (for example, docket books should show the date of disposal of a file).

6.2 Systems for recording records transactions include:

- index cards
- docket books
- registers
- computer databases (electronic document management systems)
- regular record audits or censuses (preferably once a year)

Determining which system should be used is a decision which needs to be based upon the amount of records in operational areas, an analysis of the organisation's requirements to maintain accountable records of particular activities and its information needs.

Examples of an index card, docket book, register and record audit/census form are shown by Figures 7, 2, 8 and 5 respectively.

7 Combined systems

7.1 Physical tracking, monitoring of usage and records transactions systems are susceptible to combination into one overall system. Such combined systems include:

- index cards
- docket books
- computer databases (electronic document management systems)

Determining which system should be used is a decision which needs to be based upon the requirements of the operational area(s) concerned, the number of file movements, the level of usage of the records, the demand for performance management information and the organisation's requirements to maintain accountable records of particular activities.

Examples of an index card and docket book are shown by Figures 7 and 2.

Figure 6 - Monitoring usage: example of a form for collecting statistics

REGISTRY QUESTIONNAIRE

Registry location Directorate/Division served

<i>Action</i>	<i>Number per year*</i>	<i>% of total registry time</i>
1 New files created		
2 Files destroyed (transferred from registry)		
3 Documents processed (eg put on a file)		
4 Queries (relating to registry only)		
5 List other registry duties (eg searches, census, etc.)		
a _____	_____	_____
b _____	_____	_____
c _____	_____	_____
d _____	_____	_____
6 List any non-registry duties (eg accommodation BLO, etc.)		
a _____		_____
b _____		_____
c _____		_____
d _____		_____

7 Total number of staff served by registry	
8 Number of staff in registry (by grade)	
a _____	
b _____	
c _____	
d _____	
9 Number of files held	

* can be based on a sample
CAR ME (3/97)

