

Records Management

Standards

Storage of Semi-Current
Records

Standards for the management of
Government records

RMS 3.1

RECORDS MANAGEMENT STANDARD

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Storage of Semi-Current Records

Preface

- 1 This standard has been prepared by the Public Record Office (PRO) and is one of a series of Records Management Standards for use by all organisations creating or holding public records.
- 2 Semi-current records in government departments and agencies, and in some approved places of deposit, need to be accessed for a number of reasons, such as for reference in conducting current business, for appraisal and review, and for legal enquiries. The records must therefore be kept in a useful state until such time as they are disposed of (either by destruction, transfer to archival storage, or presentation to a third party).
- 3 The majority of semi-current records will be destroyed. Nevertheless, an organisation which sets up their storage in line with this standard will have invested wisely - the records will remain accessible and future need for conservation work on those records which will be transferred to archival storage will be lessened.
- 4 Risk assessment and disaster planning are important aspects of the storage of records throughout their life-cycle. These are dealt with in a separate standard in this series.
- 5 This standard must be read in conjunction with relevant legislation, such as the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, and with some British Standards, such as BS 5839, *Fire detection and alarm systems in buildings* (1983 - 1995).

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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 storage of semi-current records. Except where stated it refers to paper records.
- 1.3 It includes the storage of semi-current public records by commercial storage companies on behalf of government departments and agencies.
- 1.4 It covers five distinct areas:
 - security
 - protection against fire
 - protection against water
 - environmental conditions
 - storage equipment

2 **Definitions**

- 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 **Archives.** Those records that are appraised as having permanent value.

- 2.6 **Client Manager.** 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 **Departmental Record Officer.** The person appointed by a government department or agency as being responsible for the management of the records of that organisation.
- 2.8 **Disposal.** The implementation of appraisal and review decisions. These comprise the destruction of records and the transfer of custody of records (including the transfer of selected records to an archive institution). They may also include the movement of records from one system to another (for example, paper to electronic).
- 2.9 **Electronic records.** Records where the information is recorded in a form that is suitable for retrieval, processing and communication by a digital computer.
- 2.10 **Fire-resistance.** The ability of an element of building construction to satisfy, for a stated period (usually expressed in hours), some or all of the criteria specified in the appropriate part of BS 476, namely resistance to collapse (loadbearing capacity), resistance to flame penetration (integrity) and resistance to excessive temperature rise on unexposed surfaces (insulation).
- 2.11 **Microform.** Records in the form of microfilm or microfiche, including aperture cards.
- 2.12 **Presentation.** The transfer to a third party of public records which have been rejected by the Public Record Office but which are not destroyed, under section 3(6) of the Public Records Act 1958.
- 2.13 **Protective marking.** The process of determining security and privacy restrictions on records.
- 2.14 **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.
- 2.15 **Public Records Act 1958.** Legislation 6 & 7 Eliz 2, Ch 51.
- 2.16 **Relative humidity.** The amount of moisture in a given amount of air as compared with that of complete saturation at the given temperature (expressed as a percentage).

- 2.17 **Retention.** The continued storage and maintenance of records for as long as they are required by the creating or holding organisation until their disposal, according to their administrative, legal, financial and historical evaluation.
- 2.18 **Review.** The examination of records to determine whether they should be destroyed, retained for a further period, transferred to an archival establishment, or presented to a third party.
- 2.19 **Semi-current records.** Records which are no longer required for the conduct of current business and which are waiting to be appraised for their long-term value or disposed of in accordance with disposal schedules.
- 2.20 **Sound recording.** A recording of sound on magnetic tape carried on an open reel or cassette.
- 2.21 **Videotape.** Magnetic or other tape carrying a series of TV images recorded magnetically, electronically or holographically.
- 2.22 **UV filters.** Plastic coatings or similar devices covering windows to prevent or reduce the ultra violet (UV) in natural and fluorescent light entering storage areas.

3 **Responsibilities**

- 3.1 Departmental Record Officers are responsible for ensuring the effective and efficient operation of all semi-current storage facilities in their departments, including the safe-keeping, accessibility and retention of records for as long as required, the transfer of those records selected for permanent preservation, and the timely destruction of records no longer required.
- 3.2 PRO Client Managers are responsible for giving advice and guidance to government departments and agencies on the management of their records, including the storage of semi-current material.
- 3.3 Estate Managers are responsible for managing (or overseeing contracts for) the provision and maintenance of accommodation, including equipment and facilities for the storage of records.

4 **Security**

4.1 Semi-current records should be protected from unauthorised access. Buildings housing them should have the following features:

- sturdy construction
- barred/secure windows
- secure doors
- guards or intruder alarms
- controlled-access key system

4.2 Enhanced provision should be made within the building for the security of protectively-marked material. This might be in the form of a storage cage, safe room (including steel doors with combination lock), locked (mobile) racking, or special alarms. Such facilities should meet the requirements of:

BS 4737 *Intruder Alarm Systems in Buildings*

BS 7042 *High Security Installations*

BS 5979 *Direct Line Signalling Systems and Remote Centres for Intruder Alarms*

4.3 Provisions for information security management should also be made and should meet the standards set out in BS 7799, *Code of Practice for Information Security Management* (1999). They should also take into account the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 in respect of the storage of personal data.

5 **Protection against fire**

5.1 Fire precautions arrangements are governed by the Fire Precautions Act 1971 and the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997. The design and construction of new buildings, and of alterations to existing buildings, are similarly controlled by building regulations. These apply equally to Crown buildings as to other buildings.

5.2 The building should be protected by an automatic fire-detection and alarm system, including smoke detectors, installed and maintained in accordance with BS 5839: Part 1, *Code of practice for system design, installation and servicing*.

5.3 The fire resistance of doors and other materials should provide protection for two hours.

5.4 Portable fire extinguishers should be provided and should be installed at various conspicuous points within the storage areas and preferably just inside each exit door.

- 5.5 A regular working relationship with the local fire brigade should be established, including fire drills, inspections of the building, and identification of areas which should be attended to first in the event of fire.
- 5.6 Staff should be instructed in the location and use of fire-fighting equipment. Fire drills should be undertaken regularly. Smoking must be prohibited in storage areas.

6 **Protection against water**

- 6.1 Basement areas and attics are particularly susceptible to ingress of water and should be avoided for the storage of semi-current records.
- 6.2 All water pipes should be lagged and ideally not be positioned within storage areas.
- 6.3 Monthly checks for the ingress of water should be carried out, including inspection for leaks, dampness or flaky paint/plaster.

7 **Environment**

- 7.1 Unsuitable environments have damaged records more extensively than any other single factor. Careful control and observation of temperature, humidity and ventilation within storage areas and regular maintenance of heating/ventilation systems are essential. A stable environment is of paramount importance. Fluctuations in temperature and relative humidity will cause significant damage.
- 7.2 A temperature within the range 13° to 18° C is recommended.
- 7.3 Relative humidity should be in the range 45% to 65%. If it exceeds the latter figure, there is a significant risk of mould growth within 48 hours.

- 7.4 Environmental conditions should be monitored weekly. Thermometers are essential to check temperature readings. Hygrometers should be used to check relative humidity levels. Thermo-hygrographs provide for weekly print-outs of temperature and humidity readings. Monitoring equipment should be calibrated once a month.
- 7.5 Microform records should be stored in accordance with BS 1153, *Processing and storage of silver-gelatin-type microfilm*. Sound recordings and videos should be stored in an environment of 4° to 16° C temperature and 40% to 60% relative humidity.
- 7.6 Lighting should provide a minimum illumination of 100 lux at floor level in order to meet health and safety requirements. A secondary automatic lighting system, independent of the normal mains supply, should be provided for use in an emergency. Other emergency lighting, such as torches in each storage area, should be available.
- 7.7 Windows should be fitted with filters, such as tinted film, to eliminate any harmful ultra-violet rays. Within the limit specified in 7.5, high light levels should be avoided in order to minimise the fading of paper and ink.

8 **Shelving and boxing**

- 8.1 Semi-current records should be stored on shelves in a way that facilitates retrieval. This will not only provide for access to the records but will also make security checks more effective.
- 8.2 Semi-current paper records need not be boxed, although boxing may be required where, for example, there are risks from damage by excessive light or by flooding, or where there is a high probability that certain records will be selected for permanent preservation.
- 8.3 Film should be stored in dust-free metal cans and placed horizontally on metal shelves. Microform, sound recordings and video tape should be stored in metal, cardboard or inert plastic containers, and placed vertically on metal shelving.
- 8.4 Records should be stored off the floor to provide some protection from flood, dampness and dust.
- 8.5 The width of aisles and general layout of storage areas must conform to fire, health and safety, and similar regulations.
- 8.6 Large documents, such as maps, should be housed in special storage equipment to ensure that they are not damaged and are readily accessible.

9 **Electronic records**

9.1 The short- to medium-term preservation period of electronic records will vary according to business needs. It is likely that increased dependence on electronic record-keeping will mean that organisations will wish to retain data for longer periods.

9.2 The British Standard BS 4783, *Storage, transportation and maintenance of media for use in data processing and information storage*, recommends the following environmental conditions for data storage media:

| Device | Operating | Non-operating | Long term |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Magnetic tape reel, 12.7mm | 18 to 24° C 40 to 60% RH | 5 to 32° C 20 to 80% RH | 18 to 22° C 35 to 45% RH |
| Magnetic tape cassettes, 12.7mm | 18 to 24° C 45 to 55% RH | 5 to 32° C 5 to 80% RH | 18 to 22° C 35 to 45% RH |
| Magnetic tape cartridges | 10 to 45° C 20 to 80% RH | 5 to 45° C 20 to 80% RH | 18 to 22° C 35 to 45% RH |
| Magnetic tape - 4 & 8mm helical scan | 5 to 45° C 20 to 80% RH | 5 to 45° C 20 to 80% RH | 5 to 32° C 20 to 60% RH |
| Optical disk cartridges (ODC) | 10 to 50° C 18 to 80% RH | -10 to 50° C 5 to 90% RH | 18 to 22° C 35 to 45% RH |
| CD-ROM | 10 to 50° C 10 to 80% RH | -10 to 50° C 5 to 90% RH | 18 to 22° C 35 to 45% RH |

9.3 Specialist advice on the preservation of electronic records is provided in the PRO guidelines *Management, Appraisal and Preservation of Electronic Records*, Vol 2, Section 5 (1999).