



Records Management Tip

Records management advice prepared for GNWT records professionals by the Records Management Unit, PWS

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Program Management Series

Implementing the Management of Electronic Information Policy

Part 3

The Program Management series looks at various media-specific issues and special issues relating to records management.

Principle # 4

Business conducted by electronic means should be adequately documented to satisfy legislated and other accountability requirements and business needs.

- Departments must ensure that electronic information is accurate, reliable, current, authentic and retains its integrity over time.
- Departments should ensure that electronic information systems capture and preserve appropriate metadata about the records.

Documenting Your Business

We create and keep records to show us what we have done, what we planned to do, and how we did it. Sometimes we create and keep records because laws and regulations tell us to keep them. Failure to keep adequate records of our actions and decisions leads to gaps in our knowledge. This may have consequences in the future.

The fact that we are doing our business with e-mail messages, databases, and the Internet does not affect our need to keep records about what we are doing.

Principle # 4 makes the point that we must keep a record of our actions, transactions, and decisions, even if they are performed via a computer.

Accurate, Reliable, Current, Authentic, and Trustworthy Records

An **accurate** record is one that faithfully reflects one's actions, the transactions that have been made, ones interactions with others, and the decisions that have been made.

A **reliable** record is one that you can trust for decision-making purposes. It should provide complete and accurate information about what has happened.

A **current** record is one that contains the most up-to-date information.

An **authentic** record is one that is what it says it is. That is, you can prove that it was actually created by the person who appears to have created it, it was created when it appears to have been created, and it has not been altered.

A record has **integrity** or is trustworthy when it cannot be altered without authorization.

Making Sure That Your Records are Accurate, Reliable, etc.

You need good procedures for how records are created and used in order to have good electronic records. You also need security features that will prevent unauthorized access to and changes to records. The security features should also keep someone from pretending to be someone else.

It should be recognized that this is not just a records management issue. The procedures that guide every government program should explain what information needs to be kept, when it should be kept, and how it should be kept. The records should be evaluated from time to time to make sure that the correct records are being kept.

Electronic records are easy to forge and alter. Therefore, you need to keep an audit trail for electronic records. The audit trail should keep track of who created a record and when, who accessed it and when, and who altered it and when. Many desktop packages, such as MS Word and MS Excel, keep some of this information in a file's "properties". Larger database systems, document management systems, and electronic records management systems usually have an audit file that keeps a detailed record of changes.

When migrating records from one system to another, the migration must be planned and documented. Any loss of or changes to the information during the migration should be recorded and explained.

Metadata

Metadata is data about data. In this case, it refers to "envelop" or "tombstone" information that an information system captures when you create, change, access, or delete an electronic record.

Many governments have adopted metadata standards. These are used to develop new business systems, document management systems, and electronic records management systems.

The GNWT does not currently have a metadata standard. The Government of Canada has developed metadata standards and guidelines that may be useful:

<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/government/products-services/007002-5001-e.html> and <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/im-gi/imrc-crgi/metadata-metadonnees-eng.asp>.