



Records Management Tip

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Active Filing Series

Using Colour-Coded Date Labels on File Folders

Using Colour-Coded Date Labels

Many departments have a practice of putting a colour-coded date label on their file folders to indicate the month and/or year in which the file was created. Colour-coded date labels are intended as a visual aid for use with files that have **date based** closure criteria. They are part of a bring-forward system for identifying and closing off records. For example, if a particular type of file always closes at the end of the year, then a label with the current year on it is useful for distinguishing this year's files from last year's files. When the time comes to box records and send them to the records centre, all of the files with a certain date on them can be easily identified, removed from the filing cabinets, and boxed for storage.

The Active Filing series gives you tips on how to manage active records in your department.

Colour-Coded Date Labels and the Fiscal Year

One of the confusing things about working in government is that the fiscal year and the calendar year are not the same thing. The calendar year runs from January to December, while the fiscal year runs from April of one calendar year to March of the following calendar year.

If your files open and close based on the calendar year, you will naturally use the date label for that year. Things are not so easy with files that close on a fiscal year basis. With fiscal year files, you have to choose a label from one of two calendar years. For example, if you have files that open during the 2004-2005 fiscal year, do you choose the label that represents April 2004 or the label that represents March 2005? As a rule, you should pick the date that represents the start of the fiscal year: 2004 in this example. Avoid using a date label to indicate the end of the fiscal year because there is always a chance that the file will not close on the date indicated by the label.

Colour-Coded Date Labels and Multi-Year Files

Many of the files that we use in government do not close on a fiscal or calendar year basis. A date label can still be useful for multi-year files if the closure criteria are date based. For example, you could manage a series of three-year agreement files by putting a label on them marking the year in which the files were opened. In three years time, the label would help you identify and close all of the files that are three years old.

Date labels are less useful when it comes to files that do not have a date-based closure criterion. You will receive little benefit from adding a date label to a file that is to remain open until superseded or obsolete. The main purpose of a date label is to identify when a file opened so that you can easily calculate when it should close. However, with files that have an **event-based trigger**, such as superseded or obsolete, you cannot predict the closed date in advance. This makes the date label irrelevant.