



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 4

Principle # 5

Electronic systems that maintain recorded information in electronic form should be used as the preferred means of using and managing information.

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

Electronic Systems

The purpose of principle # 5 is to identify where the master record is. The master record is the most complete record of an action, transaction, or decision. It is the record that you rely on to take actions and make decisions.

If you have an electronic system that is managing records, then that system should be used to store and maintain all of the records about a subject, case, event, etc. In other words, use the electronic system to keep the master record. Paper copies of records that are in the electronic system are like traditional copy files; they should not be used for decision-making.

Some systems, like e-mail, store electronic records but do not maintain them. An e-mail system does not have the ability to classify records, link them to related records, or apply retention and disposition rules. In order to maintain these records properly, they must be taken out of the e-mail system and stored in an electronic system that can maintain them. Examples of electronic systems include electronic records management systems, such as iRIMS, and document management systems.

A Note About Databases

The government uses many information systems and databases to deliver its programs. It is generally agreed that the data stored in these systems are not records. However, the reports produced by these systems are records and should be managed.

Principle # 6

Electronic record keeping systems must be documented.

- Departments should assign responsibilities regarding the development, modification, operation and use of electronic record keeping systems to ensure that electronic information remains accessible, retrievable and readable over time for as long as a business need exists or as long as legislative, policy, and archival requirements exist.

Principle # 6 is quite lengthy. Each of the sub-clauses will be discussed separately.

Electronic Systems Must Be Documented

When electronic records are presented in court, the party entering the records into evidence may be asked to prove that the records are reliable. To do this, you have to show that the electronic system that houses the records is reliable. To prove the reliability of the system, you need documentation on how the system is implemented and used.

Roles and Responsibilities

The first step in documenting the system is to document roles and responsibilities. Different users of a system will have different rights to use the system. System administrators, for example, will have full rights to use, maintain, and make modifications to the systems. Some end users, however, will only have the right to search and view the system, and will not be able to add, delete, or modify records that are stored in the system. Still other users will have rights that are appropriate to their jobs.

Decisions regarding access rights cannot be made in an ad-hoc fashion. They should be based on an analysis of user needs. They should be based on job categories, and not on individuals, so that all of the employees who are in a certain job category have the same rights to use the system. Changes to access rights must be documented, and that documentation should be kept for the life of the system.

Responsibilities need to be assigned to all employees. All employees are responsible for ensuring that the correct information is stored in the system. They are also responsible for keeping complete and accurate records.

Certain employees will be responsible for ensuring that records remain accessible over time. This may involve periodically viewing a sample of records to make sure that they can still be opened and read. It may involve migrating records to newer software versions. It may involve converting records so that they can be accessible in a different software package. Any such maintenance activities should also be documented at the time that they occur.