



# Records Management Bulletin

Records management advice prepared for GNWT employees  
by the Records Management Unit of Public Works and Services

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## Managing Your E-mail Messages

### Quick quiz: What is your e-mail personality?

- 1. I have saved every e-mail message that I have sent or received for the last five years. I don't want to print them all off and file them, but I don't want to delete them either. Some of them contain important information ... if only I could find them.
- 2. I delete every e-mail message as soon as I read it. E-mail isn't a record. It is no different than a phone call. I am sure that I am not deleting anything important.
- 3. I delete e-mail messages that contain transitory information and keep the ones that contain substantive records. All of the e-mail messages that I keep are organized according to our filing system.

### What kind of person are you?

1. **The Information Hoarder:** You are the kind of person who doesn't like to get rid of any records, because there is a chance that you might need it again some day. Your office is stacked ceiling-high with every piece of paper that has ever crossed your desk. You take great comfort in knowing that the information you need is at your fingertips ... somewhere.
2. **The Delete Key Addict:** You are the kind of person who makes decisions quickly and decisively, which is why you are so quick to use the delete key. You trust that you will remember anything that was important in your e-mail messages. Besides, the Information Hoarder keeps everything already, so why should you bother?
3. **The Perfect Records Manager:** You are a compulsive organizer. You know the department's filing system inside and out. You annoy your co-workers because you are always nagging them to file their records properly. But, you can always find the information that you need very quickly.

### So, what should you do with your e-mail messages?

Very few of us live up to the standard set by the Perfect Records Manager. Most of us are somewhere between the Information Hoarder and the Delete Key Addict. We keep some messages and delete others, and we may or may not have them organized in our e-mail program (e.g. Microsoft Outlook).

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Here are a few things to remember:

1. E-mail messages are government records. This means that you have to manage and dispose of them according to an approved records disposition authority, such as ARCS or ORCS.
2. Some e-mail messages are substantive records. Substantive records must be kept because they show what you did and what you decided to do. They should be included in your department's filing system.
3. Other e-mail records are transitory records. Transitory records are needed for only a short period of time, and may be deleted when you are done with them.
4. E-mail messages can be requested as part of an ATIPP request. You may also be required to produce them for an inquiry, commission, or court case.

**Does this mean that I have to print off all of my e-mail messages and file them?**

Not necessarily. Talk to your department's records coordinator to find out what the best option is for you. The important thing is that everyone in your office handles e-mail the same way.

There are a few different methods for managing e-mail effectively:

- **Print and File.** This is the most common method used in the GNWT. E-mail messages are printed off and filed in the office's paper files. The paper records are treated as the department's master record. Once the messages have been printed, the electronic versions are treated as either copies or transitory records.
- **Save to a Text File.** Microsoft Outlook lets you save e-mail messages as a text file (ASCII file or "text only" file) on your department's computer network. You will be able to open and read the message using Microsoft Word, Notepad, or WordPad. The good thing about this method is that anyone who has access to your network will be able to read the message. You will have to save attachments separately.
- **Use Outlook Features.** Microsoft Outlook lets you sort your e-mail into different folders. You can set up your folders so that they follow ARCS and ORCS, and match up with your paper files. Another option is to use the "Categories" feature in Outlook to assign file numbers to your e-mail. These methods both make e-mail messages easier to find. However, no one else can access those records if you are not around.

**For more information ...**

Check out these bulletins for more information:

- #2, What is a Record?
- #4, Substantive v. Transitory Records
- #5, Master v. Copy Records
- #7, Records Disposition Authorities
- #9, GNWT ARCS
- #11, ORCS

Also check out RDA 1997-02, the Transitory Records Schedule, and RDA 1997-10, the Electronic Mail Records Schedule.



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For more information, contact your department's records coordinator, or contact the Records Management Unit at 920-3009 or 873-7446