

## File Lists and Indexes

### File lists – Yawn, sounds boring

OK, so file lists are not the most interesting records management topic. In fact, file lists are so dull that sometimes even the people who are supposed to be looking after the files avoid making lists. But the fact that file lists are a bit boring does not change the fact that they play a central role in a departmental records management program. (File lists are a bit like broccoli. You might not like it, but your Mom told you to eat it anyway because it is good for you.)



### So what is the big deal about file lists?

Have you ever started to collect information on something, only to find that someone else already has a file on it? Did you think that it would be nice to know that the file already existed? It would have saved you a lot of work, wouldn't it?

Well, that's what a file list does for you. It tells you what files your office has, how old they are, and where they are. An up-to-date file list will tell you, and the people who work with you, what information you already have.

A typical file list will tell you:

- What files you have on which topics.
- What the date range of each file is.
- Where those files are located.

### Sounds good. So how do I set one up?

Well, first find out if your division or department already has some sort of file list or file tracking system in place. Your department's Records Coordinator will have this information. Departments usually try to use the same method for tracking files in all divisions.

If your department does not have a file list that you should use, then you will have to create one. Speak to your Records Coordinator for help.

File lists should be available to everyone in the office, even if only one person is responsible for keeping them up to date. The electronic version should be saved on to a shared network directory that everyone in the office can use it. You may also want to keep an up-to-date paper copy of the file list next to the filing cabinets.

File lists can be set up either as a Microsoft Word document, an Excel spreadsheet, or a database. There are advantages and disadvantages to each approach.

- Word documents are easy for most people to use, but they cannot sort the list and do calculations as easily as a spreadsheet or a database can.
- Spreadsheets are also familiar to many people and have good sorting and calculating capabilities. Spreadsheets do not have some of the more dynamic capabilities that a database has.
- Databases can be used to maintain a file list, print labels, calculate retention periods, and track the movement of records through their life cycle. Databases also have search features that make it easier to find out which files you have.

Microsoft Access and iRIMS are the two databases that are most commonly used in the GNWT for file lists. Your department can design its own MS Access databases. Speak to your Information Systems Manager about this option.

iRIMS is a records management system that is maintained by Public Works and Services. iRIMS can be used to manage:

- The file list.
- Transfers of files into the Records Centre.
- Retrievals the Records Centre.
- Final disposition of records.
- Final electronic documents.

iRIMS interfaces with MS Office desktop software, which gives you the ability to manage electronic documents. It also integrates with some document management software packages, to provide total life cycle management for electronic and paper records.

### **What kind of information should I put on the file list?**

At minimum, your file list should keep track of the following information:

- File number
- File title
- Open date
- Closed date
- Master File or Copy File
- Some people also include the retention schedule on the file list.

### **What about ARCS and ORCS?**

File lists are closely related to the Administrative Records Classification System (ARCS) and the Operational Records Classification System (ORCS). Departments use ARCS and ORCS to classify records at the primary and secondary levels. The classification number (primary and secondary number) is the first part of the file number. The file number is recorded on the file list.

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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

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Use the file list to keep track of which file numbers you have used. When you create a new file and classify it, add it to the file list. If the file requires a tertiary number, check the file list to see what the last tertiary number was, and then assign the next one.

Use the file list to keep track of which tertiaries and quaternaries numbers you have used, as well as which files you have actually created.

Remember, you do not have to create a file just because there is a primary and a secondary for it in ARCS or ORCS. Only create files when you have something to put in them.

**You said something about file indexes. What are they?**

A file index is a tool to help you retrieve files. While a file list is normally sorted according to the file number, an index is usually sorted alphabetically by title or subject headings. The index lets you look up files by title or subject. This can be useful if your co-workers are not familiar with ARCS and ORCS.



For more information on how to classify using ARCS and ORCS, see Bulletins # 9 & 11.

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