ask the experts >>>

Q: Can I destroy records that have been scanned/digitised?

A: It depends – do you have a digitisation plan?

Records Management at the University of Melbourne

Scanning paper records can support easier distribution of information or more efficient storage of hard copy. But even if you use the scanned copy as the one for your business, the original is still a public record that must be disposed of properly.

A digitisation plan gives assurance that the scanning and all audit and management processes are done with minimal risk. Once you have a digitisation plan you can scan and destroy as long as the plan is followed.

Talk to one of our Records Services staff if you think you need to create a digitisation plan.

In the next issue

Digitisation

Scanning records can be an excellent method of dealing with hard copy records – but there are rules around what and how. This issue will examine the benefits and constraints for using this kind of technology when working with records

on the record

Any questions?

Records Services staff can provide advice about records management

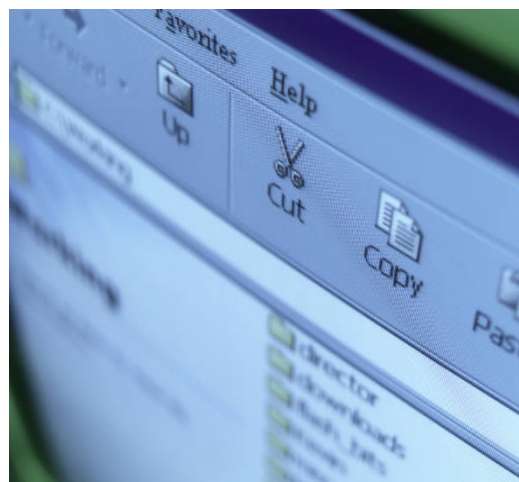Contact us on ext. **43534** or **records-services@unimelb.edu.au**

University records – well managed, accessible, utilised and digital

The University of Melbourne
Records Services

Records
Services

A service for all University staff

www.unimelb.edu.au/records

Help with disposal

Records Services has a number of tools to assist when you work on disposal of university records.

- the University Records Retention and Disposal Authority (RDA) describes types of records and how long to keep them

- Destruction list. A way to record and seek approval before actioning destruction

- Disposal advice service. Experienced Records Services staff are available to answer your questions

- Training in records disposal. Tailor a training course to your unit's needs in consultation with our staff

Find more information on the Records Services website www.unimelb.edu.au/records/

Disposal and the University

Imagine if all the business units in the University kept all their records forever. The University would be under enormous strain just managing the sheer volume of paper and electronic data – a lot of it ephemeral. Often it seems too hard to decide what to keep. Thankfully records management techniques are at hand to help make the right decision and manage records more efficiently.

Not managing physical and electronic records correctly creates problems. With rising space costs, and the push to paper-free offices, storage for paper is increasingly scarce. In addition, electronic storage, while cheaper, isn't free – and finding the records you want in a crowded and out of control shared drive is a frustrating exercise.

Over retention by keeping everything is inefficient, costly and poor records management practice. It also could have implications for FOI requests and privacy compliance. Alternatively, destroying records too early means that the University is in breach of the *Public Records Act* and may not have the evidence it needs.

That's why good disposal processes include regular appraisal of records using the University's Retention and Disposal Authority (RDA). The RDA tells you whether a record is permanent or temporary. If temporary it tells you how long it must be kept and the trigger for timing destruction.

Of course, when we say disposal, most people think only about destruction of

Disposal is the efficient timely and compliant management of records – including their transfer and destruction

records but that is only half the story. Disposal covers destruction, retention and transfer of records to the University Archives, and appraisal and storage of temporary records until they are due for destruction. All three are elements of an effective disposal program.

Most importantly, disposal isn't a one off activity. An effective disposal program is cyclical and should be undertaken regularly – at least once a year. Consider two mythical faculties – one, undertakes a regular disposal program. They have a small task to complete each year, following clearly understood procedures. The other hasn't done any disposal for and is now facing a large bill for casual staff and materials to undertake what could be a months-long project. Which would you rather be?

Remember – if you would like advice, please contact Records Services – we'll be happy to help.

Control

Controlling records sounds dramatic – but it's really just the way in which records are organised and stored to make them accessible both now and over time.

There are three main elements to controlling records.

Metadata

Metadata means the attributes of the record such as the date created, the author, the title, the purpose of the record and its history. Metadata often is captured automatically in systems like TRIM, but it can also be captured manually in the shared drive. Metadata is helpful for understanding the way in which a record was created and for what reason.

Classification

Classification is the sorting of records into groups of similar things. Some examples are grouping committee records together, or all records relating to a particular employee or legal matter. Classification is used in titling or naming records. The University has a common classification scheme that allows for consistency across business units – you can find it on the Records Services website.

Tracking

Tracking records allows staff to know where that critical file is – and without yelling across the office! From using a simple file in/out book for hardcopy files up to using file movements in systems like TRIM, knowing who has accessed a file – and where the file currently is – is vital to good information security.

Legacy records and disposal

Legacy records are generally the ones that no-one wants to remember. They turn up when least expected – during a move, in a refurbishment or when a staff member leaves and you find out exactly what they were hiding under their desk – and can cause a headache.

Put simply, legacy records are those that are no longer actively used by the business unit but have not yet been appraised or controlled. Here are some ideas for working out how valuable legacy records are and tips for preventing future headaches.

Tip 1: don't let legacy records happen in the first place. Organise your current records well and have a plan for their lifespan. Business practices with good records management at their core save you time later. Putting off disposal often results in more time taken later to sort out a mess.

Tip 2: work out exactly how much and what type of records you have to deal with. Files? Boxes? Storerooms? This will give you a scope of the issue and allow you to start planning and budgeting for the project.

Tip 3: talk to Records Services to help you plan, scope, appraise and sentence these records – our job is to provide expert support.

What is NAP?

NAP stands for Normal Administrative Practice.

According to the Public Record Office Victoria,

> *The destruction of some public records is permitted without authorisation under normal administrative practice (NAP). NAP covers the destruction of ephemeral material of a facilitative nature created, acquired or collected by public officers during the course of their duties*
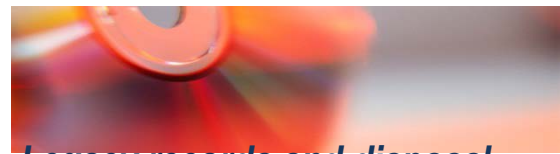
In practice this means that if you have material that:

- isn't created by your area, and you know it's held by the originating area

or

- is rough notes or working documents that were used to make a more final document (such as scribbled notes from a meeting taken to create typed minutes)

these records can be disposed of without having to refer to the RDA or record them on a Destruction List.

However – if you think that this might be the *only* copy – remember to check before destroying them! And don't forget to use secure destruction bins to destroy material that isn't freely available.

If you'd like this information in a handy decision flowchart – contact Records Services

Dispelling *myths about disposal*

There are many myths out there about the how, what, where and why of disposal …

let's see if we can dispel some

Myth 1 – Disposal means destruction.

False

Disposal is often used interchangeably to mean the destruction of records. However it also means the transfer of permanent records to the Archives or the placing of temporary records in a local holding area until they are due for destruction

Myth 2 – All records should be kept for 7 years.

False

This statement assumes that all records are the same and have the same value. The amount of time a record must be kept depends on what type of record it is – including the reasons it might be needed in the future. Refer to the University Records Retention and Disposal Authority for information on retention periods.

Myth 3 – If you have old records you can throw them out.

False

Old doesn't automatically mean of no value. Records may not be relevant to today's priorities but they may provide critical information about past events and activities. Old or legacy records can contain precedents for decisions or explain the establishment of a university function. Sometimes they have historical or cultural significance. Use the University Records Retention and Disposal Authority to determine how long records should be kept or seek advice from Records Services.

Myth 4 – I can get any company to provide a secure destruction service.

False

The university service provider for destruction of records is *In Confidence*. They supply 240L destruction bins to areas on a fortnightly basis. To order secure destruction bins go to the Property and Campus Services webpage about confidential waste bins.

Myth 5 – Putting university records in a recycle bin is the best way to destroy them securely

False

Records still need to remain confidential, even if they're not wanted any more. The only exception is if the material is freely available such as copies of leaflets or newsletters. This material can be recycled.

For confidential records, the secure destruction service provider shreds and pulps paper records so that they cannot be reconstituted. They also provide a certificate to guarantee that destruction was carried out as authorised.

Disposal and electronic records

It is very easy to keep adding documents to your shared drive without giving much thought to their disposal. The email inbox, too, often ends up being used as a storage area for miscellaneous items. Important University records may become hard to use because they are buried deep in shared drives or individual inboxes. Records that should have been legally destroyed become a cost or privacy liability if they are over-retained.

Regularly review both shared drives and email as part of your disposal activity. Make sure you refer to the University RDA and advice about NAP before pressing the DELETE button.

Disposal of non-paper media/eWaste

EWaste is the disposal of hardware, peripherals and digital media such as CDs that have come to the end of their life. Records held on this kind of media are also subject to correct disposal requirements. You must not destroy the media without knowing the retention period of the records held on the media.

If the records are not time expired (that is, already past their destruction date), consider migrating them to another format such as TRIM or the shared drive.

If they are time expired, make sure you list the contents on a Destruction List before disposing of them.

For computer hardware, make sure that you have removed files before s off as eWaste for recycling through the University's eWaste suppliers.

For digital media – contact Records Services to discuss disposal solutions for this kind of material.