

Managing Physical Records During and After a Disaster: Guideline

FOIP and Information Management, Enterprise Information Management

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MANAGING PHYSICAL RECORDS DURING AND AFTER A DISASTER: GUIDELINE

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Introduction

The Government of Alberta is a trusted steward of information held on behalf of Albertans. In the event of a natural disaster (e.g., flood, fire), building malfunction (e.g., sprinkler malfunction, leaky roof, pest infestation), or accidental loss (e.g., spilling coffee on a box of records) records must be managed properly to ensure that they are preserved, restored, and only disposed of in accordance with an approved records retention and disposition schedule.

Important: All government information must be disposed according to an approved Records Retention and Disposition Schedule. This guideline provides information about which Records Retention and Disposition Schedule should be used if records are damaged as a result of a disaster.

This guideline provides direction in the event of a disaster where physical records have been damaged. For the purposes of this guideline, the term disaster refers to any event, major or minor, that results in contamination, damage, or loss to physical records.

This guideline does not provide direction regarding disaster preparedness or business continuity planning. For direction on disaster preparedness or business continuity planning, please contact the appropriate Business Continuity Coordinator.

Digital Records - For direction on managing digital records affected by a disaster, please contact your [Sector Information Security Officer](#) (SISO).

Audience

This document has been developed for government staff who have and/or share responsibility for the management of physical records in their department (e.g., Senior Records Officers, Information Management Directors, Information Management Professionals, etc.).

Scope

This guideline applies to:

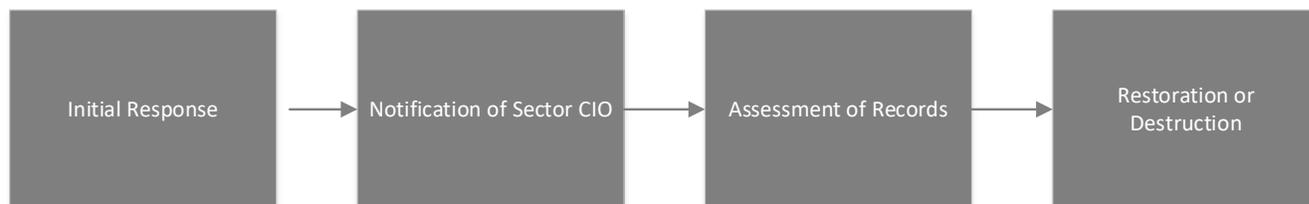
- all departments defined under schedule 11 section 14(1) of the *Government Organizations Act*; and
- agencies, boards and commissions as defined in schedule 1 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Regulation.

Agencies, boards and commissions that are not contained within schedule 1 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Regulation are encouraged to align with this guideline.

This guideline is applicable as described above, regardless of the physical location of damaged records (i.e., records stored in a government building, records stored with a vendor, records located out-of-province).

Process Overview

The following section outlines the steps that must be completed prior to determining if records should be restored or destroyed following a disaster.



Initial Response

After a disaster has occurred, the worksite manager is responsible for the initial assessment of the situation. Staff safety is the first priority. It is important that records are not touched or removed from an affected site until the situation has been thoroughly assessed; there may be health risks associated with the contaminated area and/or records (e.g., mould). Staff should use appropriate safety gear and follow procedures when handling contaminated boxes and/or records. Contact the appropriate Health and Safety Officer with any questions or concerns before entering a site.

Once the site is safe to enter, the worksite manager is responsible for the following actions:

1. Determining the type of records affected by the disaster, and the type of damage to the records. For example: if water damage has occurred, is it tap water, sewer water, or river water? If the records are contaminated, is it by mould or by an infestation by insects?
2. Determining the urgency of recovery efforts based on the types of records. At the discretion of the site manager, and in conjunction with Occupational Health and Safety Officer and/or the Business Continuity Officer, the following actions may be taken to mitigate damage:
 - a. Flood or other water damage
 - i. moving valuable records to higher shelves or to higher ground;
 - ii. segregating wet records from dry records; and
 - iii. freezing wet records within the first 24 hours.
 - b. Fire
 - i. ensuring doors are properly sealed while evacuating the building; or
 - ii. in the case of a forest fire threat, consider shipping valuable records to a secondary location using a secure transportation method.
 - c. Pest infestation
 - i. determining the type of pest;
 - ii. setting appropriate traps; and
 - iii. contacting building management.
3. Completing the Damaged Records Checklist – Worksite Assessment portion and providing it to the Sector Chief Information Officer (SCIO) for information and decision making purposes.
 - a. Damaged Records Checklist, form TDS12124 is available in the [Government of Alberta Form Repository](#).

Reminder: do not assume records are unsalvageable or rush to dispose of damaged records.

Notification - SCIO

Once the SCIO has received the Damaged Records Checklist – Worksite Assessment portion from the worksite manager, they are responsible for ensuring the required steps are completed; they may delegate these responsibilities as required:

1. Notify the Business Continuity Planning (BCP) Coordinator that a disaster has occurred.
2. If the anticipated insurance claim exceeds \$5,000, notify Treasury Board and Finance, Risk Management and Insurance.
3. If an on-site inspection is required, notify the Joint Worksite Health and Safety Committee.
 - a. If there is no Joint Worksite Health and Safety committee, notify the department BCP Coordinator.
4. Follow up with the worksite for additional details regarding the damaged records.
5. Complete the Damaged Records Checklist – Information Management Assessment portion.
6. Determine if the records are salvageable or unsalvageable.

Assessment of records

Before proceeding with restoration activities or destruction, worksites should assess the records to determine the appropriate course of action. The SCIO is responsible for ensuring the required steps are completed; they may delegate this responsibility as required.

1. Determine the business value of the records by consulting the following sources:
 - a. records inventories, if there is no inventory consult with the worksite to determine the approximate date range of the records; and/or
 - b. retention and disposition schedules.
2. If the business value is low, proceed with destruction.
3. If the business value is critical, vital, or historical, determine if the records are salvageable or unsalvageable.
 - a. If salvageable:
 - i. notify the Expenditure Officer that records must be restored;
 - ii. proceed with restoration activities; and
 - iii. notify the Alberta Records Management Committee (ARMC).
 - b. If unsalvageable, proceed with destruction.
4. If the records are responsive to litigation and/or a FOIP request, determine if the records are salvageable or unsalvageable.
 - a. If salvageable:
 - i. notify FOIP Coordinator(s) and/or lawyer(s);
 - ii. notify the Expenditure Officer that records must be restored;
 - iii. proceed with restoration activities; and
 - iv. notify the ARMC.
 - b. If unsalvageable:
 - i. notify FOIP Coordinator(s) and/or lawyer(s); and
 - ii. proceed with destruction.

ARMC notification should include the following:

- a briefing note explaining the situation;
- a copy of the completed Damaged Records Checklist; and
- any supporting documentation, such as photographs.

Restoration of records

Depending on the volume and extent of the restoration needed, the worksite may decide to proceed with in-house restoration activities at the discretion of the SCIO; caution should be taken to ensure employee safety (e.g., mould growth is likely if records have been wet for an extended period of time). If the worksite is unable to manage restoration activities in-house, they will work with the SCIO to complete restoration activities.

The SCIO is responsible for the following activities; they may delegate this responsibility as required:

1. working with Expenditure Officer to identify and contact service providers;
2. providing service provider quotes to the Expenditure Officer for review;
3. providing service provider quotes to the worksite for evaluation;
4. developing a Statement of Work between the service provider and the worksite;
5. advising Risk Management and Insurance once restoration is complete, and providing financial information as requested; and
6. notifying the ARMC that records restoration is complete.

The service provider is responsible for:

1. complying with IMT Standards, Policies and Guidelines;
2. collecting the records from the worksite;
3. completing restoration activities; and
4. returning the records to the worksite.

The worksite is responsible for:

1. reviewing service provider quotes and selecting appropriate vendor for restoration activities;
2. reviewing the quality of the work as per the Statement of Work agreement; and
3. informing the SCIO once the restoration activities are complete.

Destruction of records

In order to comply with legislated requirements, it is essential that unsalvageable records are only disposed of in accordance with the appropriate records retention and disposition schedule (Schedule).

The SCIO is responsible for ensuring required steps are completed; the SCIO may delegate this responsibility as required.

In cases where records have not met their retention period, or have a final disposition of "Archives":

1. apply Schedule 2011/002-A002 Damaged Records;
2. follow the Government of Alberta Disposal Process; and
3. notify the ARMC.

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In cases where records have met their retention period and have a final disposition of “Destroy”:

1. apply the appropriate Schedules (department specific or **All GoA**)
2. follow the Government of Alberta Disposal Process; and
3. notify the ARMC.

Important:

- If the final disposition of the records is archives, notify the Provincial Archives of Alberta before proceeding with destruction.
- If the records are responsive to litigation and/or ongoing FOIP request, notify FOIP coordinator(s) or lawyer(s) before proceeding with destruction.