



# Information Overload

Issue 35, July 2005

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## Welcome:

Welcome to this month's edition of Information Overload. This month we discuss document retention and disposal, where do you store those bits of paper you think you need to keep, and those documents and files your accountant said you should keep for a couple of years – now did he say five years, or was it seven? We hope you enjoy reading.

As always, if you have any suggestions or would like to see us cover any other topics, we would love to hear from you. Just send an e-mail to [training@iea.com.au](mailto:training@iea.com.au):

Lorraine Bradshaw  
Marketing & Training Coordinator

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## In this Issue we will be looking at:

- Storage Options – Internal or External
- So what are you storing?
- Additional Resources
- A Thought to ponder.

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In a previous edition of Information Overload (Issue 33) we looked at the importance of filing. Just what do you do with all those pieces of paper, documents and files you keep “just in case” you need them again at some point in the future? Where do you file them so that you can find the information you need when you need to? As you are no doubt aware, filing current or active records is only a small part of records management, an important part nonetheless – if you have ever misplaced an important document, you will know exactly what we mean. However, there will come a point when current records become less important “experience shows that the need to consult a closed file or other document no longer required for the conduct of current business evaporates rapidly after the first 18 months.” (Penn, Ira A et al: *Records Management Handbook* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Aldershot UK, Gower, 1994 p229). Whilst these records may not be required by your organisation on a daily or regular basis, they cannot simply be disposed of once the filing cabinet becomes full. Despite the move towards creating and managing electronic records “the paperless office is not quite a reality. Statistics show that we use more paper today than at any other time in our history” (Lurie, Michael: *Informaa Quarterly*, Vol 18, Issue 4, November 2002 p38).

Let me emphasise at this point, we are primarily talking about paper-based records, if you would like to understand some of the implications of archiving/storing electronic records, please read our white paper on electronic archiving. This can be downloaded from our web site – [www.iea.com.au](http://www.iea.com.au) (Issue 19 of Information Overload, and its follow up Issue 19.1).

So what do you do with those paper based records that you still need to keep, but are no longer important on a day-to-day basis, do you simply buy another filing cabinet? Do you put

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them in a box and stick them in a cupboard somewhere and hope you don't have to remember what is in them? Do you send them offsite to a commercial storage facility? Do you hope the problem will go away as soon as everyone stops creating and using paper?

## Storage Options – Internal or External?

Where you decide to store your records is dependent on a number of factors, not least of which are:

- How many records do you create each year? And do you have room to store several years' worth of records/documents/files within your current office space? If you are considering storing little used or inactive records in your current office space, you may also like to take into consideration:
- What is the cost per square metre of your office space? Premium office space usually comes at a premium price; therefore it would make economic sense to house little used or inactive records in a lower cost storage facility. This can be another area owned by the organisation, for example – basements, and other on-site storage facilities. However, if your organisation does not have the requisite storage space for a large number of inactive records it may be more economically feasible to store these records in a commercially owned, purpose built warehouse type storage facility, rather than your organisation acquiring another building for this purpose – although this does depend on a number of factors in itself. If you would like to conduct a simple experiment of how much your current/active records is costing you per year to store within your office space, a two-drawer vertical filing cabinet takes up about 10 square feet (1 square metre) of usable floor space, but holds only 4 linear feet (1.2 metres) of files. (NB a linear foot equates to 35cm). The annual cost of storing records in a two-drawer filing cabinet in office space which costs \$12 per square foot per annum is \$120 or \$30 per linear foot or \$60 per file drawer

$$\frac{\text{Annual cost/ft}^2 \times \text{ft}^2 \text{ occupied}}{\text{cabinet capacity}} = \text{unit cost of storage}$$

*figures taken from "How to Manage Your Records: A guide to effective practice. Edited by Peter Emmerson. P62*

- Are the inactive records going to be boxed, or will they remain in files in filing cabinets, on open shelving or within a compactus? This will impact on the number of storage units you will require to purchase each year. If the records are going to be boxed, consideration should also be given to how these boxes are going to be stacked. Will they be stacked directly on the floor or are they going to be stored on shelving units?
- What floor are the records going to be stored on? Boxes of records weigh between 15-20kg each, a storage rack 2m wide and 3m high will store 50-60 boxes – this equates to approximately a tonne in weight. If the boxes are going to be stored on upper floors of your organisation (eg attics) it is worth knowing whether or not the floor is capable of holding the weight, or whether you will need to relocate the storage units to the lower levels. *Figures taken from P124 Organising the Office Memory: Theory and Discipline of Records Management. J Eddis Linton.*

When choosing where to store your records, there are some other things you will need to take into consideration:

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- What is to be stored? Is it just paper-based records, or will other media be included? Is the storage facility able to handle all types of media?
- Does the storage facility you have chosen have adequate room for growth, or provisions for further growth been taken into consideration?
- Is the building itself structurally sound or is there likelihood of damage to the records from flooding, burst pipes, faulty wiring, or a lack of vermin control. Do you know what the existing fire and water detection systems are?
- Does the storage facility have adequate maintenance systems in place? For example, cleaning, servicing of heating ventilation and air conditioning systems, and electricity.
- Is the storage facility located close to airport flight paths, rivers, chemical factories or industrial zones.
- What security measures are in place and are they followed? This is a major concern with confidential information. As we have mentioned in a previous edition of Information Overload, identity theft is a growing concern. Given that all employee records have to be kept until the person in your employee (or was in your employee) reaches 71 years of age, it is important to ensure that personal details are not easily obtained whilst in the storage facility.
- How long are the records to be kept? Whilst some records can be disposed of after a relatively short period of time, there are some records that should never be disposed of, for example insurance documents, therefore it is essential that the storage facility that you have chosen to house your inactive documents will be around for a while!
- Are you required to store your documents with a "preferred supplier"? What provisions for movement of records have been made should the preferred supplier change?
- Have you visited your chosen storage facility? and
- Do you know what records you currently have in storage?

## So what are you storing?

Do you know what you currently have in storage and do you know what will need to be stored in the future and for how long?

According to the latest edition of the Australian Record Retention Manual (ARRM) there are over 1800 individual pieces of legislation relating to record keeping. Before you dash off to your local library to read the government gazettes, you may be interested to know that each piece of legislation pertaining to record keeping in the private sector has been read and abstracted already, as well as cross referenced and indexed. But perhaps more significantly, there is also a Retention and Disposal Schedule that you can use to determine which of your records you should keep and for how long. If you keep all "like" records together in a box (or series of boxes depending how many records you create each year) they can be dealt with as a group rather than individually. However, not all organisations manage their records in this way, sometimes it is easier to put the inactive records into a container and ship it off to storage, figuring you will deal with the problem when you have more time.

Do you know how many boxes you currently have in storage? If your records are stored with a commercial provider, do you know how much you are being charged for the service? Perhaps a more important question to how much are you being charged is do you know what is in every box? Do you have a complete inventory, or only a partial one? How many of those records you are paying to have stored actually need to be kept?

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With the start of the new financial year, and spring just around the corner, it is perhaps a good time to make a start on getting rid of all those records you have stored 'just in case' "even a cursory examination of any filing cabinet is almost certain to reveal that nearly half of the stored records no longer have much relevance to current needs." (*Linton, J.E. Organising the office memory: The Theory and Practice of Records Management, University of Technology, Sydney, Kuring-gai Campus, Centre for Information Studies Publications p113*). In a finding by Kalthoff and Lee from a survey made by the Dartnell Institute of the USA back in 1978 it was stated that:

- 65c in every dollar expended in record keeping and filing is wasted
- 70% more records are retained than are needed
- 85% of filed references are never referenced
- 95% of all references are to documents that are less than 3 years old and
- 45% of filing space is used to store duplicates and records of doubtful reference value.

(*Kalthoff, R J and Lee, LS; Productivity and automation. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1981 p116*).

Whilst this seems to be a rather old text to be quoting, there are some organisations that appear to still have problems with its paper based record keeping systems. As we mentioned in a previous edition: a study conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers found that professionals spend 5-15% of their time reading information, but up to 50% of their time looking for pertinent data.

The average organisation also:

- Makes 19 copies of each document it receives or produces;
- Loses 1 out of every 20 documents;
- Spends 25 hours recreating each and every lost document;
- Spends 400 hours per year searching for lost files; and
- Spends \$120 in labour searching for each misfiled document

*IDM: Image and Data Manager; September/October 2003 P53*

## **Additional Resources**

As always we hope we have given you some food for thought. If you would like more information on this subject, there are a range of books and standards that can assist you with looking after your documents and records, including:

- Penn, Ira A et al: Records Management Handbook 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Aldershot, Gower, 1994
- Kennedy, Jay and Schauder, Cheryl: Records Management: A Guide for Students and Practitioners of Records Management. Melbourne, Australia; Longman Cheshire 1994
- The Australian Record Retention Manual, Information Enterprises Australia P/L, Fremantle, Western Australia 2004 - [www.iea.com.au](http://www.iea.com.au)
- F is for Filing: A Simple Guide to managing and storing necessary information for individuals and small business. Information Enterprises Australia P/L, Fremantle, Western Australia 2005 – [www.iea.com.au](http://www.iea.com.au)
- AS 4390.6 – 1996: Storage. Homebush, NSW, Standards Australia, 1996
- AS/ISO 15489.1- 2002 Information and Documentation – Records Management-Part 1: General; Homebush, NSW, Standards Australia 2002

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- AS/ISO 15489.2- 2002 Information and Documentation – Records Management-Part 2: Guidelines; Homebush, NSW, Standards Australia 2002
- Storing to the Standard: Guidelines for Implementing the Standard for the Physical Storage of Commonwealth Records, National Archives of Australia 2001. This is a voluntary code of best practice aimed at storing semi-active and inactive Commonwealth documents before they are legally destroyed. It contains a set of guidelines for government agencies to use to arrange their in-house storage or to help with the selection of outsourced storage and is available from - [www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/storage/standard.html](http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/storage/standard.html)

Information Enterprises Australia also run a series of training courses on record keeping issues, including retention and disposal of records. To view our current training calendar please visit our web site – [www.iea.com.au](http://www.iea.com.au)

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### **A T hought to Ponder:**

“It is not merely the trivial which clutters our lives but the important as well”  
**Ann Morrow Lindbergh**

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Your comments and suggestions on the subject of this newsletter are most welcome. Or if you would like to see other issues covered in future editions, please email me at [training@iea.com.au](mailto:training@iea.com.au)

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