

Disposal and Destruction Terminology

Purpose

This Records Advice will help ACT Government employees to understand the common terminology used in the process of deciding whether to retain or destroy records. This advice should be used in managing ACT Government records, and can also be applied to other government information and data holdings.

Understanding the terms

The process of determining which records must be retained and which can be destroyed is a particular concern for archivists and other recordkeeping professionals. It uses some specialist language which may not be familiar to some people. This Records Advice explains some of these terms and their implications for records management.

Appraisal

Appraisal is the process of evaluating business activities to determine which records need to be captured and how long those records need to be kept to meet business needs, accountability requirements, and community expectations. In the ACT Government the appraisal process is used to develop a records disposal schedule.

Further information is available in advice relating to the *Assess Principle*.

Control Records

Control records are records created to help in the management of other records. They may include file registers and lists, movement cards, or subject indexes. For most ACT Government agencies, the primary control record will be a records management database such as HP Content Manager (HPE CM aka TRIM) or Objective. It is important that control records are kept up to date with the location of records, particularly when they are transferred to secondary or external storage, including when transferring digital records from one system to another. Control records must be updated when records are sentenced and destroyed.

Disposal

Disposal is the range of processes associated with implementing a records disposal schedule. It is most often thought of as destruction of records, but the term also has other meanings:

1. Destruction – the process of ensuring that records, information and data are physically destroyed or deleted so that they are no longer usable or accessible. Destruction of records, information and data must be properly authorised, irreversible, secure, documented and must use processes appropriate to their media. See also *Authorised destruction methods*.

2. Transfer to a secondary storage provider – hard copy records that are not in day to day use may be transferred to secondary storage, such as with ACT Record Services. ACT Government organisations may also use external storage providers provided that there are appropriate contractual arrangements in place, and they can demonstrate compliance with the *Territory Records Act 2002*. Also see *Preparing Records for Transfer*
3. Archiving – records, information and data that have been designated as ‘Retain as Territory Archives’ (RTA), must be kept and appropriately stored to ensure continuing access and availability to the public once they enter the open access period. For physical records this will usually involve transferring files and other media to secondary storage such as Records Services. For digital records it may involve moving records, information and data offline, restricting them from further alteration or transferring them to a digital repository. Copying digital records to CD-ROM or other portable storage media is not acceptable for archiving long-term records, but may be adequate for records, information and data that only needs to be retained for a short period. See also advice related to the *Protect* and *Retain* principles.
4. Transfer of ownership – records, information and data may be transferred to a new owner as part of the sale or privatisation of an agency or by donation to a community or other appropriate group. Transfers of ownership must be authorised by the Director of Territory Records.

Disposal Class

A disposal class is a section in a records disposal schedule that describes a group of records that must be kept for the same length of time, for example:

Working papers documenting the development of advice relating to the financial management function

Disposal Trigger

A disposal trigger is an event, specified in a records disposal schedule, from which the authorised destruction date of a record is calculated. Common disposal triggers are ‘last action’ or ‘employee’s date of birth’. Disposal classes in a records disposal schedule will specify a retention period and a disposal trigger for each class of records.

Last Action

An action on a file is anything that makes active use of or changes the record. Administrative tasks that are purely related to the management of the record itself, such as movement to a new location, migration to a new software version, or assigning it a new number, are not considered actions on the file. However, if any change is made to the record itself, such as adding or editing documents on a file, an action has been taken.

‘Last Action’ is a common disposal trigger in records disposal schedules, and the date at which a record is able to be destroyed is often calculated from the date of the last action. Records

are deemed as having 'No Further Action' if there have been no actions carried out on the record and it has exceeded the retention period applied to it.

Records Disposal Schedule

A records disposal schedule is a legal instrument issued by the Director of Territory Records to authorise the disposal of ACT Government records. It specifies classes of records and the minimum length of time they must be kept.

Retention Period

A retention period is the period for which a disposal trigger specifies in a records disposal schedule that a record must be kept. Disposal classes in a records disposal schedule will specify a retention period and a disposal trigger for each class of records.

Sentencing

Sentencing is the process of applying appraisal decisions to individual records by classifying them according to a records disposal schedule and applying the disposal action specified.

For more information

For further information or any question you may have please contact the Territory Records Office. Further information is available in the *Retain* principle.