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## Vital Records

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**Purpose of the Order** This Order establishes policy for identifying and protecting records and information necessary for EPA to continue its key functions and activities in the event of an emergency or disaster. In the wake of September 11, 2001, the awareness of potential disaster has been heightened, and the need for safeguarding records so that they are available in an emergency, has been increasingly recognized. The primary authority for establishing a vital records program within the federal government is 36 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 1236, Management of Vital Records.

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**Background** Each federal agency is required by statute and by regulation to establish and maintain a vital records protection program. An effective vital records program is essential to successful records management, is an integral part of EPA's information resources program, and is one of the emergency preparedness responsibilities of every federal agency.

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**Policy** EPA is committed to working with its employees to protect and safeguard vital records. This order sets forth EPA's policy and responsibilities in developing a vital records program. This policy requires the creation of programs for Headquarters offices, Regions, Laboratories, and Field Offices in coordination with EPA's Continuity of Operations (COOP) planners. It is intended to ensure that the Agency's critical records are identified and protected so that there will not be a loss of critical information after a disaster.

Components of a vital records program include: identifying records needed for performing the Agency's critical functions; protecting the legal and financial rights of EPA, its employees, and the people it serves; developing a plan to protect vital records and assess damage to and the recovery of any records affected by an emergency or disaster; and,

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protecting and safeguarding vital records from loss, misuse, and unauthorized information access or modification.

A vital records program must meet the following minimal requirements:

- \*  Identification of the records that are vital for each essential function identified in EPA's Continuity of Operations (COOP) plan.
- \*  Completion of a vital records inventory listing the title of the records, original location, record custodian, record volume, format of record, name of electronic system (if applicable), location of the vital record copy, contact person for information on the record, and rotation schedule for transfer of duplicate vital records to alternate storage.
- \*  Protection of the records in electronic format, whenever feasible, and at an offsite location. This may involve dispersal (placing hard copies, micrographic, or electronic copies elsewhere) or storing system backups offsite. Offsite storage must meet basic standards, such as fire prevention and temperature and humidity monitoring.
- \*  Procedures for responding to an emergency by identifying the records affected by the disaster, carrying out appropriate salvage efforts, and communicating information appropriate to that type of disaster.
- \*  Procedures for records recovery, including pack out, restoration, and relocation, as well as handling contaminated materials and confidential information.
- \*  Procurement and maintenance of basic disaster recovery supplies, including first aid kits and the minimum equipment necessary for equipment and records salvage (tape, flashlights, mops, brooms, etc.), and a list of emergency service numbers which include building operations and firefighting, hospital, and sanitation contacts.
- \*  Provision for training, validating, and updating the vital records and disaster recovery plans.

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**Anticipated  
Outcomes/  
Results**

EPA's vital records will be protected, accessible, and usable in the event of an emergency or disaster. This involves the following tasks:

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- \*  Developing and maintaining a current list of vital records which includes their location, media, volume, record custodian, and rotation schedule.
- \*  Obtaining basic disaster recovery supplies.
- \*  Maintaining updated emergency response and records recovery information.

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**Performance Measures**

Success in implementing this Order will have the following performance measures:

- \*  Provide annual certification of the vital records plan by each Headquarters office, Region, Laboratory, and Field Office.
- \*  Actively and routinely participate in tests and exercises of EPA's emergency preparedness function, and conclude they would have the records and information necessary to continue key functions and activities in the event of an emergency or disaster, or implement corrective actions and continuous improvements where there are gaps in needed records and information.
- \*  In the event of an actual emergency or disaster, have the records and information necessary to continue key functions and activities.

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**This Order Applies To**

All EPA organizations.

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**Roles and Responsibilities**

Assistant Administrators, Deputy Chief of Staff, Regional Administrators, Laboratory Directors, the General Counsel, the Inspector General, and Heads of Headquarters Staff Offices are responsible for:

- \*  Designating a vital records coordinator to oversee the program.
  - \*  Implementing a vital records program within their area of responsibility to accomplish the objectives identified in federal regulations and EPA policies and procedures.
  - \*  Developing vital records oversight roles and communication networks with all program units including Field Offices and other facilities to ensure that the vital records program is implemented at all sites under their program jurisdiction.
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The Agency Records Officer, Records, FOIA, and Privacy Branch (RFPB), Office of Information Collection (OIC), Office of Environmental Information (OEI) is responsible for:

- \*  Designating an Agency Vital Records Officer.
- \*  Developing vital records policy.
- \*  Ensuring the vital records program meets federal and EPA requirements.

The Agency Vital Records Officer, Records, FOIA, and Privacy Branch (RFPB), Office of Information Collection (OIC), Office of Environmental Information (OEI) is responsible for:

- \*  Developing Agency-wide vital records procedures.
- \*  Conducting training and outreach activities.
- \*  Reviewing lists of vital records submitted by Headquarters offices, Regions, Laboratories, and Field Offices, and maintaining a consolidated list of EPA vital records.

EPA Managers and Supervisors are responsible for:

- \*  Maintaining an awareness of the objectives and requirements of the vital records program.
- \*  Determining which records within their physical or legal custody are vital.
- \*  Assigning responsibility for implementation and maintenance of the vital records program within their offices.
- \*  Providing the required resources to support the vital records program.
- \*  In conjunction with the records management office, ensuring that copies of vital records are properly managed throughout their life cycle as they are updated, stored and replaced (cycled) in accordance with established requirements.

Headquarters, Regional, Laboratory and Field Office Records Officers and Liaisons serve as the vital records coordinators and are responsible for:

- \*  Ensuring vital records are identified and maintained in accordance with established requirements.
- \*  Working with program staff and EPA s Agency and Regional Emergency Coordinators to assess possible threats and risks to determine the level of protection or response that may be required.
- \*  Working with program staff and EPA s Agency and Regional Emergency Coordinators to develop an action plan for protection of vital records and systematically reviewing and testing the plan at least annually.
- \*  Preparing and updating the list of vital records and how they are protected.
- \*  Submitting the list through senior management (e.g., Assistant Administrator, Regional Administrator) to the Director, Office of Information Collection (OIC), Office of Environmental Information (OEI), on October 1<sup>st</sup> of each year, certifying that the list has been reviewed and updated.
- \*  Transferring and replacing copies of vital records as documented in the vital records inventory.
- \*  Conducting vital records briefings, training sessions, and validation tests.

Continuity of Operations (COOP) Program planners are responsible for:

- \*  Working with records management staff to develop an action plan for protection of vital records needed to accomplish designated COOP essential functions and systematically reviewing and testing the plan at least annually.

EPA employees are responsible for:

- \*  Assisting with the identification and protection of vital records.

- Authority**
- \* ☐ 44 United States Code Section 3101 - Records Management by Agency Heads; General Duties
  - \* ☐ Executive Order 12656 - National Security Emergency Preparedness Functions, Activities, and Assignment of Responsibilities (1988)
  - \* ☐ 36 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 1236 - Management of Vital Records
  - \* ☐ U.S. EPA, National Security Emergency Preparedness Policy (Order 2040.1A1)
  - \* ☐ U.S. EPA, Uniform Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan Policy (Order 2030.1)
  - \* ☐ U.S. EPA, Information Management Resources (IRM) Policy Manual (Directive 2100), Chapter 8 - Information Security, and Chapter 10 - Records Management
  - \* ☐ U.S. EPA, Records Management Manual (Directive 2160)
  - \* ☐ Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Federal Preparedness Circular - Vital Files, Records, and Databases

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**Sunset/  
Review Date**

This directive will be reviewed within three years of its approval date.

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**Supersedes/  
Cancels**

Not applicable.

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