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The National Archives and Records Service of South Africa Act and the management of public records

Records are created for a purpose and, as evidence of transactions, they have on-going use as a means of management, accountability, operational continuity, legal evidence and disaster recovery. The National Archives and Records Service has a statutory responsibility to promote effective management of public records to support evidence-based governance and service delivery. Records created in electronic and paper-based record keeping systems contain the memory of governmental decision-making and its impact. The National Archives and Records Service also has a responsibility to ensure that this memory is maintained and protected for centuries to come.

The National Archives and Records Service of South Africa Act charges the National Archivist with the proper management and care of public records in the custody of governmental bodies. It specifies that no public record under the control of a governmental body may be transferred to an archives repository, destroyed, erased or otherwise disposed of without the written authorisation of the National Archivist. The Act also charges the National

Archivist with the responsibility to determine the records classification systems to be applied by governmental bodies and to determine the conditions for the management of electronic records systems.

Using commercial off-site records storage facilities

The National Archives and Records Service requires that governmental bodies should implement a systematic disposal programme to decongest registries and storage areas of unneeded records. Off-site storage should never be seen as the solution to a records storage problem.

It is expensive to store unneeded records off-site. Governmental bodies should apply for disposal authority and carry out all necessary clearance actions of records of which the retention periods have lapsed, before records are moved off-site.

Finding suitable commercial off-site records storage facilities

Should a need arise to move records off-site, the National Archives and Records Service requires that the records should be stored in off-site facilities that were evaluated by the National Archives and Records

Service as being suitable for storage of archival records.

Governmental bodies wishing to use off-site storage facilities should first obtain written approval from the National Archivist, in terms of section 13(2)(a) of the National Archives and Records Service Act, 1996 as amended. The National Archives and Records Service's Records Management Division would then inspect the off-site storage facilities before the public records are transferred. This is done to determine their suitability for the storage of public records.

The National Archives and Records Service has designed a comprehensive checklist against which the services and facilities of commercial off-site records storage facilities should be measured. This checklist is available as Annexure 20 of the *Records Management Policy Manual*.

Accountability for records in off-site storage facilities

Records that are stored off-site remain the property of the governmental body. Such a body may never renounce its responsibility to ensure that the records are stored under archival conditions. If a governmental body transferred records to an off-site facility and the

National Archivist is of the opinion that public records are not being managed properly by the facility, he/she can require that the records should be moved to another storage facility.

Specific attention should be given to the following:

- Governmental bodies should ensure that records are filed into file covers according to the file plan before they are boxed and removed to the off-site storage facility. It may be necessary to conduct a back-filing project prior to moving the records off-site. [For information regarding back-filing projects, see pp. 21-22 of the *Records Management Policy Manual*].
- Records that qualify for disposal in terms of disposal authorities issued by the National Archivist should as far as possible be destroyed before records are moved off-site. Only records with longer retention periods should be moved off-site, since it does not make sense, from a financial perspective, to pay an off-site storage facility to store

records that could have been destroyed.

- The records manager should ensure that the off-site storage facility is familiar with the requirements of the National Archives and Records Service Act before records are transferred into its custody.
- The records manager should inspect the facility regularly after transfers have taken place.
- The records manager should submit copies of the inspection reports to the National Archivist.

Contracting the services of a commercial off-site records storage facility

Governmental bodies should, in contracts with commercial off-site records storage facilities amongst others stipulate that

- off-site storage facilities should have 24-hour security;
- off-site storage facilities care for the records as required in part 5 of the *Records Management Policy Manual*;

- any damage to records should be reported to the governmental body immediately;
- boxes in which records are stored should be replaced when there is noticeable damage through regular handling; and
- records are stored in boxes sequentially according to the file plan.

Further information

Further guidance on the management of public records can be obtained from:

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