

Transitory Records

The purpose of this guidance is to enable employees to carefully consider what documentation is needed in the work process and to identify and dispose of transitory records based on these requirements. Each program area or work group should determine what records must normally be created and filed to fully and accurately document business activities, and what records are transitory and therefore do not need to be filed. Staff at all levels should understand these principles and apply them consistently.

Transitory records are government records that have **short-term use** only and **do not need to be filed**. They are produced or received in the course of routine actions, in the preparation of other records which replace them, or for convenient reference. They are **not needed as evidence of an activity** and they can normally be **deleted or destroyed immediately**.

Transitory records can be in **paper or electronic** form, including email. *Examples* include:

- electronic copies of email messages, text and instant messages or other electronic documents where one copy has been filed with related records in the office recordkeeping system.
- messages confirming short term arrangements (e.g. taxi ready at 5pm)
- alerts and notifications (e.g. check your email; meeting about to start)
- with compliments (e.g. thanks for taking the time to meet)
- duplicate copies distributed for reference use, or sent to multiple recipients, where one copy has been filed to a recordkeeping system (e.g. copy is filed by the originator of the e-mail, the main recipient, or a designated recordkeeper for a work group and yours is considered duplicate)
- duplicate copies maintained only for convenient reference use
- preliminary drafts or working notes that are not needed as evidence of a decision, because they have been replaced by a subsequent draft or final version
- spoiled sheets (from printers, photocopiers, etc.), old or unused government forms, etc. that have not been filed as records to the office filing system
- notices of social events such as retirements or office parties
- routine messages such as notices “to all staff,” requests for meetings, training opportunities, news releases, etc.

Whether records are transitory or not depends on how the information is needed and used in a particular business context. **It is important to note that:**

- Not all drafts or working papers are transitory records. In some cases it is necessary to retain these as evidence of the evolution of a final document or of the decision-making process.
- Not all emails are transitory records.
- Not all copies are transitory records. Copies may need to be kept in one or more recordkeeping systems because they form an essential part of a file or set of records. For example, they may be needed to understand related records or provide context.
- Paper records that have been digitized are not considered transitory records. Consult the Government Records Office for appropriate management of paper source records.

Records that have been kept and filed as evidence of government business are, by definition, not transitory.

Destruction of transitory records

As with all government records, destruction of transitory records is permitted only by authority of an approved records schedule.

Every department and agency has a records schedule for transitory paper records, called “Non-filed Office Paper.” The schedule may be used at any time to transfer non-filed office paper to the Government Records Centre for destruction. See [Procedure GRO 2: Transferring Government Records](#). This is the same secure process used for all government records in paper form, to protect confidential information.

Electronic transitory records are often kept in electronic workspaces (e.g. email boxes, personal drives) for convenient reference and re-use. Once they are no longer needed, they should be deleted. The government-wide General Records Schedule GRS 0001A authorizes employees to delete these transitory records.

Unauthorized destruction of records as transitory

Unauthorized destruction of government records is prohibited by law and subject to offence provisions (see [The Archives and Recordkeeping Act](#), s. 28).

- Intentional use of a transitory records schedule to destroy government records that were kept and filed constitutes unauthorized destruction of records. This is true even if the records have been kept longer than their scheduled retention period. The correct records schedule for the records must be used. This will provide evidence that the records were properly retained and managed.
- Intentional use of a transitory records schedule to dispose of government records that have not been scheduled constitutes unauthorized destruction of records. If no records schedule exists for the records, they must be maintained until an approved records schedule is in place.

Hold on destruction

In exceptional circumstances, records normally due for authorized destruction may be needed for a legal proceeding, investigation or *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FIPPA) request. In this case a Hold may be placed on the records to stop destruction.

Where a Hold has been placed on transitory records, regular authorized destruction is not permitted until the Hold has been removed.

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