

# Records Management, Disposal and Retention

by Charlene Endsley-Burge, MBA, SR/WA

*Charlene Endsley-Burge is the assistant division manager for Legal and Business Services division of the Oklahoma Department of Transportation in Oklahoma City.*

*Charlene has been a member of Oklahoma Chapter 33 since 1984. She currently serves on the International Board of Directors and is the Region 2 representative on the International Property Management Committee.*

**P**aper, paper, stacks of paper and files, what do we do with all of these records?

In recent years, businesses have become aware of the problems surrounding the information explosion. Strategies have been formulated to deal with the mass of accumulated records.

These strategies have taken the form of establishing records management programs to promote efficiency and economy in the creation, maintenance, use, retrieval and storage of records to ensure that information is safely and conveniently preserved for as long as it is needed.

Such programs have effectively consolidated information, prevented the creation of unnecessary records, facilitated the filing and retrieval of information, protected essential records, and determined the useful life of each type of record. The use of low-cost record centers or archival repositories provide for safe, economical and convenient storage of records which are no longer required for day-to-day office need.

Records management encompasses all record formats including machine-readable records, microforms, audio and video tapes, and paper records. This can provide comprehensive and systematic control of records creation, use and disposition.

The foundation of a good records management program is a records disposition schedule. This schedule, a company's guideline for the retention and disposition of its records, lists all records series created or received and indicates the length of time each series is to be retained. If consistently followed, a records disposition schedule is the most effective tool a company has to control its records and information. The process of developing a records disposition schedule and a records management program is not very complicated, but may take several months to complete. It involves inventorying, analyzing and finally writing the schedule. It requires personnel to look closely at the manner in which files are created, maintained and organized. Often, files have to be rearranged for records management practices to be put into effect.

The scheduling process serves as a management tool by showing activities that are duplicated, those that can be streamlined, and others that can possibly be eliminated. When the project is over and records management is operational, personnel will know who is responsible for maintaining which files, and a needless accumulation of duplicate files can be eliminated. A good records management program can save time, money and space.

The first step in establishing a records disposition schedule is an inventory of all company records to determine:

- purpose and function
- physical format



## Right of Way Appraisal Specialists

**Allen, Williford & Seale** has been providing appraisals on right of way projects since 1977. Our staff is committed to thorough quality reporting within the time constraints of your project. Right of way organizations across the country rely on **Allen, Williford & Seale** for complete appraisal services. Call us on your next project.

- Appraisals
- Impact Studies
- Market Studies
- Expert Witness Testimony
- Litigation Support
- Appraisal Review & Management
- Training & Seminars

**Allen, Williford & Seale**  
14925 Memorial Drive, Suite 200  
Houston, Texas 77079  
713/493-4444

Serving State, Federal, Local Agencies;  
Pipelines; Utilities; Communications;  
and Private Industry

- original record or a copy
- legal retention requirements including dates and quantity of current record
- organization (e.g., alphabetically, chronologically or by subject)
- availability of a filing key, index or other location aid

federal law requires that a record be retained for a minimum length of time after it has served the purpose for which it was created. Most records, however, have a predictable life expectancy and should be destroyed at the expiration of a specified retention period. Records are created to assist in carrying out spe-

requirements have been met. Certain financial records must be retained for one year after audits have been completed. Companies or agencies which operated, in whole or in part, with federal funds will have to satisfy both state and federal audit requirements before their financial records may be destroyed.

*In some cases, state or federal law requires that a record be retained for a minimum length of time after it has served the purpose for which it was created.*

Inventorying involves a systematic approach and is carried out using a *records inventory report*. Separate inventory sheets are completed for each record series and for those stored in two or more locations. A record series is defined as documents, in any format, that are arranged in a single filing system and relate to a particular subject or which have resulted from the same activity. Normally, records maintained in a company's offices are inventoried before those located in remote storage areas. The former are more accessible and company personnel are more familiar with their functions and contents. Once office records have been inventoried, records housed in other locations can be readily identified and inventoried. The forms compiled from inventorying each location are then filed. Although the introduction of new records series or changed formats may require schedule updating, an inventory will not need a major revision for many years, if ever.

A few records series have enduring administrative, legal, fiscal or research value and therefore must be kept permanently (appraisals, deeds, title information). Other records have continuing legal, fiscal, research, or evidential value because they document policy decisions or contractual agreements. In some cases, state or

cific functions or tasks, and once these have been completed, they cease to have administrative value.

Records pertaining to financial transactions must be retained in a company's custody until all audit

The most difficult determination to make when establishing retention periods is research value. A few record series, with relatively short administrative, legal or fiscal importance, may document or contain important information about historically significant events or about a company's organizational and functional development. Such information or evidence may serve as a guide for

*Continued on Page 27*

## LINDERLAKE CORPORATION

### FIELD SERVICES GROUP

*"Service You Can Count On"*

Committed to servicing the Telecommunications Industry, Public Utilities, State and Local Governments, and Private Industry from Coast to Coast.

CALL or WRITE for our Statement of Qualifications regarding:

#### REAL ESTATE DIVISION

Right-of-Way Negotiations  
 Title Searches  
 Fee Purchases  
 Permitting  
 Appraisals  
 Relocation Assistance  
 Records Management  
 Lease Acquisitions  
 Site Acquisitions  
 Tower Site Acquisition  
 Tower Site Disposition

#### ENGINEERING DIVISION

Telecommunications Design  
 Computer-Aided Design/Drafting  
 Feasibility Studies  
 Design and Plan Preparation  
 Construction Management  
 As-built Recording/Archiving

#### OSP SERVICES DIVISION

Underground Facility Locating  
 Route Surveillance  
 System Audit  
 Right-of-Way Maintenance

12855 South Cicero Avenue • Second Floor • Alsip, Illinois 60658  
 Telephone Number: (708) 385-5855 • Facsimile: (708) 385-5875

Quality Licensed or Experienced Professionals Encouraged to Apply  
 EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER