

What is the purpose of this guidance?

This document explains what a retention schedule is, where to find them and how to read them.

Why is this important?

Retention schedules provide the only legal authority to disposition records. This not only includes paper records but also the deleting of electronic records.

What is not covered by this guidance?

This guidance does not discuss which records are subject to public disclosure. As with any other request for public records, the records must be reviewed on a case-by-case basis to determine if the records or any of the content is exempt from disclosure.

Still have questions?

Contact [Records and Information Management \(RIM\) \(Internal Link\)](#).

See the [Glossary of the State General Schedule](#) for additional Records Management terminology.

What is a Retention Schedule?

A retention schedule identifies the minimum amount of time records must be kept. Records and information have a life cycle. The retention schedule designates how long a record must be kept once it reaches the inactive stage in its life (retirement) and what happens to it at the end of its life (see [Tip 1-4](#)).

The retention schedule provides the only legal authority to “disposition” records (destroy, convert, or transfer from our custody). Schedules are approved by the Washington State Records Committee ([RCW 40.14](#)) through the Agency Records Officer.

The process of selecting your retention schedules is changing in WSDOT. They are now being identified through a records inventory and appraisal with the agency records officer. Until this process is complete and your office has a file plan, records disposition is on hold.

Note: If there is an active or potential for a request for public disclosure or litigation, potentially relevant records cannot be dispositioned. Instead, disposition is suspended and potentially relevant records preserved until the issue is resolved. This does not change the retention schedule; it puts them on “legal hold.”

Is there more than one type of Retention Schedule?

There are two types of retention schedules: General Schedules (GS) and Agency-Unique Schedules. General Schedules cover general types of records typically kept by all agencies (fiscal, contracting, equipment, etc.). Agency-Unique schedules cover records unique to each agency’s unique business, such as bridge plans, highway plans, etc.

Unique schedules may override a GS when it does not meet the agency’s unique legal requirements or business needs. A GS may override an old unique schedule, depending on the timing and situation. Figuring out which schedule to use can be confusing, so it’s not a good idea to use the GS without help. Work with Records and Information Management to identify the GS you need. This will ensure the correct schedule is added to your office’s list of retention schedules.

Where can I find my list of Retention Schedules?

Employees should not self-select their retention schedule. See the records officer. You can find Department of Transportation’s Retention schedule on the [Records and Information Management \(RIM\) \(Internal Link\)](#) intranet site. (**Note:** Process changes are pending.)

How do I read a retention schedule?

All retention schedules have the same basic components:

Record Series Title

The general title of the retention schedule, but it should not be used to interpret its full scope; instead see the “Description.”

Description

Describes the full scope of the records covered by the schedule and may include the general subject area and specific things that fall within. Examples are specific documents or forms, or general supporting documentation. This is designed to be broad enough to ensure records are managed together and reduce the number of schedules needed.

Cut-off

Designates when the records become inactive, which is when the retention period starts. Records that have not met cut-off are still considered “active” and needed for current business, so a retention schedule does not apply yet. Some common cut-off points are end-of-biennium, fiscal year, termination of agreement, case closed, or superseded. Sometimes, a cut-off can be more flexible, such as “when the administrative purpose is served,” and the user can decide how long the record holds value.

Retention Period

The total amount of time WSDOT is responsible for retaining the record. On Agency-Unique schedules, the schedule designates specific time periods, such as months in the office and months at the Records Center. The Records Center will not accept records until after the office period has passed. On General Schedules, months in the office and months at the Records Center are lumped into one period, and records may be transferred to storage at the Records Center at any time during that period.

Disposition Authority Number (DAN)

Every schedule is assigned a unique identifying number by State Archives. This number follows a schedule forever because the name or description of records can change over time. The DAN tracks its history.

Office File or Memoranda and Official Public Records (OFM-OPR)

Records must be designated one of these two types of records as defined by [RCW 40.14.010](#).

The exception is records that are usually “administrative materials with no retention value” as described by [General Schedule 50](#).

Special and/or Disposition Instructions

Describes any special instructions related to managing, transferring, or destroying the records. Some common examples are:

- “**Archival**” because they have been designated to have historical significance.
- “**Microfilm**” because there is a requirement to microfilm the records for long-term preservation.
- “**Essential**” because they will be needed to resume business immediately following a disaster.