How long do I need to keep email?

Retain email records in accordance with your office's file plan and the records schedules. The exact length of time will vary depending on the activity that the message documents. Retentions range from thirty days to permanent.

What if the message is not a record?

Delete email that is not a record when you no longer need to refer to it.

Do I have to print out all my email records?

Recent NARA guidance allows you to delete "transient" messages (with short term interest of 180 days or less) that have minimal or no documentary of evidential value. Otherwise, you must print out emails that qualify as records and file them with your organization's paper files. Be sure to print out the receipt message and attach it to the email message.

Where can I get more information?

- REE Records Management Home Page: http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/recmgmt/
- REE Policies, P&P 251.8, Records Management:: http://ww.afm.ars.usda.gov/ppweb/PDF/251-08.pdf
- REE Procedures, 251.8M, Records Management Manual: http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ppweb/PDF/251-08M.pdf
- USDA Records Management Policies and Procedures Home Page: http://www.ocio.usda.gov/records/policy.html

For additional guidance or to answer any questions you may have please contact:

Stephen Pollard
USDA ARS OCIO
REE Records Officer and
REE Information Security Coordinator

Suite 580-C Portals Bldg. (Cube 543)
1280 Maryland Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250-0306

Voice: 202-720-3359
Fax: 202-720-3907
Cell: 202-746-6610
Email: steve.pollard@ars.usda.gov

Mailing Address:

MAIL STOP 0306
(Suite 580-C Portals Bldg.)
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington DC 20250-0306

USDA REE

USDA REE Research, Education, & Economics
United States Department of Agriculture

MANAGING YOUR RECORDS

A Guide For REE Agencies

ARS

ERS ECONOMIC RESEARCH SERVICE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

CSREES Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service

NASS Fact Finders For Agriculture U.S. Department of Agriculture

Every day REE agencies staff conduct research and other business that affect all Americans and in doing so record and keep information about their actions.

Every REE employee is responsible for managing agency records. If you create a document using a word processing application, enter information into a database, file a document in a folder, record observations in a lab. notebook, or do anything else that fulfills an agency function, you are a records custodian and are responsible for ensuring the safety, easy accessibility, and proper disposition of the records in your custody. As a records custodian you have three major records-related responsibilities:

- Create the records necessary to document the activities for which you are responsible.
- Maintain those records where they can be easily retrieved and protected from premature loss or disclosure.
- Dispose of those records in accordance with Federal regulations.

How are records managed?

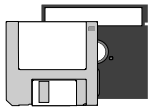
Records are managed through a records management program that controls the creation, use, and disposition of all records, regardless of format. Records management provides practical tools and techniques to manage all records, regardless of format, through the entirety of their life cycle, from creation to final disposition, in an efficient, cost-effective manner. A properly implemented records management program ensures that information is available when and where it is needed, in an organized and efficient manner.

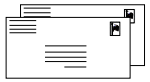
Records management comprises all the record keeping requirements that allow an organization to establish and maintain control over information flow and administrative operations. This allows agencies to remain accountable to the public and agency staff to make timely and informed decisions.

What is a record?

According to 44 USC 3301, records include:

"…all books, papers, maps, photographs, machine-readable materials, or other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received by an agency of the United States Government under Federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business and preserved…by that agency or its legitimate successor as evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the Government or because of the information value of data in them."





What should I do with records that I no longer use?

Inactive records should be removed from office space. Employees should check the schedules to determine the record's retention period. Eligible records, with more than twelve months left until authorized disposition, should be sent to the nearest Federal Records Center.

In the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area, the Washington National Records Center in Suitland, MD should be used.

How do I retire records to the records center?

Instructions for retiring records are available in the procedures manual on the ARS records management website at http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/recmgmt/faqs.htm#retire.

Can I retrieve files from a Federal Records Center if I need them?

Yes, contact your Records Management Officer (contact information is on the back of this brochure).

Is email considered a record?

Under certain circumstances, email does constitute a Federal record. To determine whether the information contained in the email message makes it a record ask whether it:

- contains information developed in preparing briefing papers, reports, and studies.
- reflects official actions taken while conducting agency business.
- conveys information on agency programs, policies, and essential activities.
- conveys statements of policy or the rationale for official decisions or actions.
- documents oral exchanges, such as meetings or telephone conversations during which policy was discussed or formulated or agency activities were planned and discussed.