

E-mail Management

Employees Should:

- Only keep e-mail messages that are records; dispose of non-records immediately.
- Dispose of transitory records (such as duplicates and drafts) as soon as they are no longer needed - Keeping information longer only creates greater expense and potential liability.
- Monitor e-mail regularly - Remember to check the "sent" mail as well as the "inbox."
- Retain and dispose of e-mail records according to records retention and disposition schedules.
- Retain records only in the authorized paper format or electronic medium on agency network drives.
- File e-mail electronically - Organize e-mail records like all other paper records, properly naming files and file folders to identify the contents.
- Always save attachments in their native format.
- Protect privileged and confidential material.
- Consider basic rules for e-mail etiquette.

Work with the supervisor and IT when leaving commonwealth employment to ensure the e-mail signature block and out-of-office assistant are updated to include notification of the imminent departure and contact information for an alternate contact. Store e-mail messages that are records where they are accessible to the supervisor for the continuity of business.

E-mail Management Overview

E-mail has become a primary means of communication and e-mail messages must be managed like any other type of record created or received by an agency. Due to its informal nature, the use of e-mail has caused a variety of issues in both the private and public sectors. Employees often use e-mail very casually and, instead, should think twice before using e-mail to convey certain types of information. Caution should especially be exercised when there is a need to communicate sensitive information. It is sometimes best to communicate verbally, by placing a phone call or by walking to a colleague's office, to deliver certain types of information. Despite its often informal use, e-mail messages used to conduct commonwealth business are commonwealth records. As such, e-mail messages may have to be produced to the public under the Right-to-Know Law.

E-mail is simply a "format" and not a record type. Retention for e-mail messages, the length of time the e-mail must be kept, is based on the content of the message. The commonwealth has designated three different kinds of e-mail:

- 1) Non-Record E-mail. E-mail that is personal or not business-related is not a record and is to be deleted immediately after it is sent or read. Spam is to be deleted immediately.
- 2) Transitory E-mail. Transitory messages are of short-term interest with no lasting business value. They are to be retained only as long as they have administrative value. About 80% of business e-mail is "transitory" for the majority of employees. Examples of transitory messages are:

- routing slips;
- voice-mail and phone messages (e.g. "Please return call ...");
- miscellaneous notices or memoranda, such as "To All Staff" e-mails, notices of holidays or special events, minor information items concerning routine administrative matters or other minor issues not pertaining directly to a program area;
- informational copies of widely distributed materials such as committee minutes and agendas, newsletters and publications such as published reports, administration manuals, telephone directories, catalogues, pamphlets, or periodicals;
- information received as part of a distribution list or e-mail messages received from listservs and other Internet sources, solely for convenience of reference;
- preliminary drafts of letters, memoranda, or reports, and other informal materials that do not record decisions;
- documents that are superseded or updated, (may not include official reports, newsletters, etc.); and
- unsolicited advertising materials (e.g. brochures, company profiles, price lists, etc.).
- duplicate messages. Regardless of the content of an e-mail message, in most cases, the creator of the e-mail message is most likely to be the "owner" and will be responsible for retaining the e-mail message and any associated attachments if it is a record*. When duplicate copies of e-mail messages are sent within the agency, most often the sender is responsible for maintaining the agency copy for the retention period* and the recipients of the duplicate messages may treat the message as a transitory file. If duplicate copies of e-mail messages are sent to the agency from an external source, the agency should develop a policy as to who, among the multiple recipients, shall maintain the agency record*.

*See "3) Record" below.

- 3) Record. E-mail messages that meet the definition of a record "*Information, regardless of physical form or characteristics, that documents a transaction or activity of an agency and that is created, received or retained pursuant to law or in connection with a transaction, business or activity of the agency. The term includes a document, paper, letter, map, book, tape, photograph, film or sound recording, information stored or maintained electronically, and a data-processed or image-processed document*" (MD 210.5) are records.

E-mail messages that are records must be kept for the duration of the appropriate retention period defined on a records retention and disposition schedule. For example, information on a contract may be kept with other documents concerning the contract and is to be deleted once the contract has expired and the retention period is met. If it is difficult to decide whether an e-mail is of short-term usefulness or if it should be kept for the full length of the record retention period, treat it as a record and follow the appropriate records retention and disposition schedule. Listed below are more examples of e-mail messages that are records:

- Case Files
- Incident Reports
- Administrative Support such as routine correspondence, activity reports, personnel data, purchase orders, travel expense statements, calendars of business activities, etc.
- Policy and Program Records such as policy and procedure, official correspondence with citizens or with govt employees on the formulation of policies or procedure, annual or statistical reports on program activities, organization charts, mission statements, studies regarding agency operations, directives, etc.

All records which are not transitory are to be retained for the length of their stated retentions as defined by their content and the appropriate records retention and disposition schedule. These non-transitory records can be routinely destroyed in accordance with the agency-specific or general records retention and disposition schedules in the normal course of business by an agency, assuming there are no outstanding legal or audit issues. Transitory messages may be destroyed when they are no longer useful, and thus do not have uniform retention periods.

Tips for Creating E-mail Messages

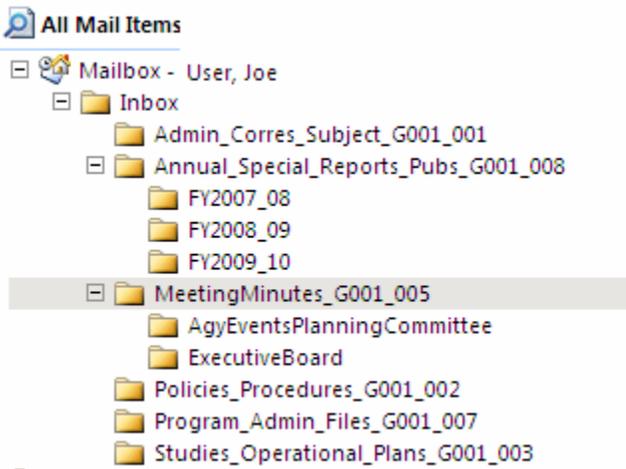
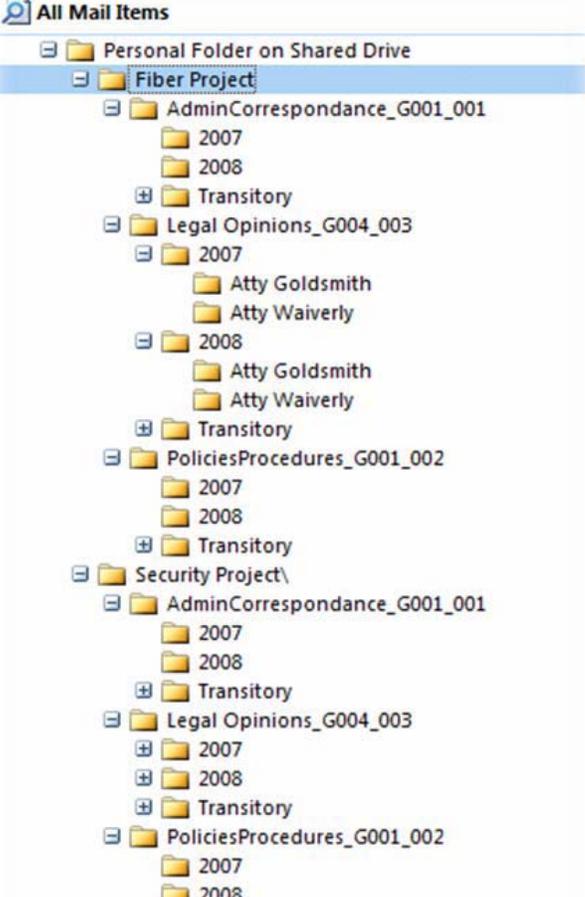
- Properly name the e-mail message by giving it an appropriate "Subject". This will aid in identifying and saving the message.
- Protect privileged and confidential material.
- Compose the e-mail message professionally.
- Do not mix subjects within the same e-mail message.
- Employees are cautioned to ensure the intended recipient's e-mail address is correct. Be sure the appropriate e-mail addresses are listed in the "To", "Copy", or "Blind Copy" fields for those intended to receive the message. (Multiple employees may have the same names.)
- When finished constructing the message, proofread, use the spell check tool and make corrections before transmitting the message.

Basic E-mail Etiquette

- Compose the e-mail message without slang or messaging jargon.
- Evaluate the content for appropriateness. Keep e-mail messages free of language that is racist, sexist, obscene, menacing, harassing, discriminatory, or in any way inappropriate.
- Use caution with the use of all capital letters or all lowercase letters. A message written in upper case only indicates “shouting”. One written in lower case only is informal and not business-like.

Filing E-mail

E-mail that is considered to be a record should be filed according to records retention and disposition schedules. Filing e-mail is similar to filing any other electronic document. E-mail may be filed with other same subject records in established folders on the network drive, or transitory records could be stored in folder structures set up within the e-mail system:

EXAMPLE A	EXAMPLE B
 <p>All Mail Items</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mailbox - User, Joe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inbox <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Admin_Corres_Subject_G001_001 Annual_Special_Reports_Pubs_G001_008 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> FY2007_08 FY2008_09 FY2009_10 MeetingMinutes_G001_005 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AgyEventsPlanningCommittee ExecutiveBoard Policies_Procedures_G001_002 Program_Admin_Files_G001_007 Studies_Operational_Plans_G001_003 	 <p>All Mail Items</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal Folder on Shared Drive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fiber Project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AdminCorrespondance_G001_001 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2007 2008 Transitory Legal Opinions_G004_003 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2007 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Atty Goldsmith Atty Waiverly 2008 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Atty Goldsmith Atty Waiverly Transitory PoliciesProcedures_G001_002 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2007 2008 Transitory Security Project\ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AdminCorrespondance_G001_001 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2007 2008 Transitory Legal Opinions_G004_003 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2007 2008 Transitory PoliciesProcedures_G001_002 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2007 2008