PDF/A Frequently Asked Questions for Local Governments

1. Is it true that the policy calls for retention of three different copies of the PDF/A files?
   The policy calls for a Security Preservation File which must be in PDF/A format and must be kept separate from all other copies. A separate Backup Copy of that file must be retained offsite for disaster recovery purposes. The policy *permits* a third copy—a Use copy—that may be retained in any format (such as PDF or TIFF) and is for daily access by users.

2. Microsoft Office 2007 can create PDF. Is this as good as PDF/A?
   PDF is not the same as PDF/A (and does *not* meet the criteria of the PDF/A Policy), but you can create PDF/A with Microsoft Office 2007 and later. First, see if you can create a regular PDF from your version of Microsoft Office (for example, open a Word document, select 'Save As' and see if PDF is available as an option). If not, you may need to download a separately available plug-in (called "Save-As-PDF") from the Microsoft website. Once you are able to save documents as PDF, create the PDF/A by selecting 'Save As,' then selecting 'PDF' as the format, then—before saving—click through the 'Options' to select 'PDF/A Compliant.'

3. Does the PHMC need to approve PDF/A images as it once did for security microfilm?
   No. PHMC will not approve the images. However, counties must submit a *one-time* notification to PHMC for *each* series of records they intend to retain as PDF/A in accordance with the policy. The form, Appendix E from the Municipal Records Manual, states that "a municipality will be keeping permanent records in conformance to the policy and guidelines, which require counties to quality check all their scans.

4. Do I have to keep the Security Preservation File offsite?
   You can lower the risk of data loss by keeping the Security Preservation File at a location separate from the Use Copy that you access regularly. Whether you maintain the Security Preservation File onsite or offsite, it should be kept at a separate location from its Backup Copy.

5. How far away should I keep my Backup Copies?
   There is no national standard for how far a backup copy should be kept from its original, because conditions vary so widely across the country. You should assess your particular vulnerability: much of Pennsylvania, for example, is prone to floods, so the Security Preservation File and Backup Copy should not be maintained in locations that are on the same flood plain. Your own risks may be different, but you should assess your situation and then determine the appropriate distance to separate the copies to minimize the risk of both copies being damage or destroyed in the same disaster.

6. Do I have to use a content management system to store my PDF/As?
   A content management system makes it easier to manage electronic documents, though it makes retention more complex because the content management system must be maintained or migrated for as long as the documents themselves are retained. If the PDF/As are not going to be stored in such a system, it is recommended that you name the documents using strict file naming standards that will

help you find the documents later on. You can decide the naming convention yourself, but it is essential that it be written down and then used 100% of the time. An online search for "document naming conventions" will provide examples of best practices.

7. Can PDF/A files contain copyright information, like TIFFs can?
   Yes. PDF/A gives you the ability to save metadata (such as the copyright) within the PDF/A document itself. The method of adding metadata to a PDF/A is the same as adding it to a PDF. An online search for "adding metadata to PDF" will locate instructions.

8. Why are PDF/As editable if the Security Preservation File is not supposed to be edited?
   PDF/As are editable, but only if the user makes a conscious choice to enable editing. The policy does not prohibit all editing but says (in 7.4.2) "Security procedures must prevent <u>unauthorized</u> addition, modification or deletion of the Security Preservation File." and, in the definition of the 'Security Preservation File' (in 5.14): "a copy of an electronic record that is stored in a secure manner so that it cannot be accessed except by a limited number of <u>authorized</u> users and only when no other copy of the document will suffice." In neither case does the policy prohibit the file from being edited.

9. I hear there are different types of PDF/A. Will we have to migrate up to each revision?
   There are multiple versions of PDF/A, however the standard references only version PDF/A -1, which is the only version of PDF/A approved by the standard at this time.

10. Will future developments to the PDF/A standard make current PDF/A versions obsolete?
    No. The ISO standard requires that all future PDF viewing applications be backward compatible so that they are capable of correctly displaying older versions of PDF/A.

11. We have been scanning documents in TIFF format for many years and have always verified that the scanned image matches the paper original. If we convert these TIFFs to PDF/A do we need to verify each of the new PDF/A images again?
    Since the content of the new PDF/As will match the TIFFs exactly, there should be no need to verify the content of the new PDF/A files. Any conversion from one electronic format to another, however, can result in corrupted files. It is a good idea to inspect the new PDF/As to verify that none have been corrupted. You can inspect all of them or just a percentage of the files—whatever makes you feel comfortable that all the images converted properly.

12. We need high-quality photographs for some of our case files which are long-term. PDF/A does not have the same quality. Do we need to retain the original photographs?
    Presently, PDF/A is the only file format acceptable (under this policy) for the retention of long-term or permanent electronic records. If PDF/A is not suitable for retention (because it does not replicate the necessary quality or function of the original document, for example), then the original should be retained.

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13. Is PDF/A less prone to corruption than other file formats?
Like all electronic file formats, PDF/A files can become corrupted. Most often, though, it is the medium used to store the file (DVD, hard drive, etc.) that becomes corrupted, rather than the format itself. Multiple backups of files—properly handled and stored—provide the best insurance against file corruption.

14. What does a municipality do in regard to expungements and making sure all copies of a record are disposed of?
The best way to ensure total destruction of electronic records is through data shredding, a software program that overwrites the storage medium with other data multiple times. Data shredding is not a physical shredding, but a virtual one. The Department of Defense has a data shredding standard, DoD 5220.22-M, and there are others available.

15. Are PowerPoint files good candidates for converting to PDF/A?
PDF/A is a good format for any file that can be 'frozen in time.' A PDF/A is like a snapshot of the original document, so a PDF/A of a PowerPoint presentation would preserve each slide as if it were an image. PDF/A will not preserve animations or other actions associated with an original PowerPoint presentation. In the same way, PDF/A will preserve an Excel spreadsheet as a snapshot; users of the PDF/A will not be able to sort the data and perform calculations as they could with the original spreadsheet. For this reason, PDF/A is an excellent tool to preserve records *after* they have reached the end of their active life and are no longer needed for active use.

16. Can PDF/A be used with CAD?
PDF/A is very suitable for archiving CAD drawings, unless the drawings contain 3-D objects (which are not supported by PDF/A).

17. PDF supports "mixed" objects, like audio and video. Can these be used in PDF/A?
PDF files with audio and video cannot be converted to PDF/A. PDF/A must guarantee an exact reproducibility, which is not possible with embedded objects like sound or movies.

18. Can PDF/A files be made text searchable?
If a PDF/A file is created from a digital text document, the text will automatically be recognized, so you don't have to worry about a PDF/A file being text searchable unless the file was created from a scanned paper document. While both the 1a and 1b versions of PDF/A are acceptable under the PDF/A policy, PDF/A-1a lays out especially stringent requirements about the fonts that may be used and acceptable file structure, so this level of conformance is recommended over PDF/A-1b if you are concerned with text searchability, text extraction, and the reuse of content. Note that if a PDF or PDF/A is created from an image (rather than text), the content will not be searchable.

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19. Can PDF/A files be encrypted?
    No. Encryption is not permitted in PDF/A files. PDF/A files are fully self-contained, meaning that everything required to read the file is contained within the file itself. If a file requires a password to open it, the password—or the person who knows the password or digital key—would be external to the PDF/A, which would no longer be self-contained.

20. Can PDF/A files contain an electronic signature?
    Yes. It is permitted to digitally sign PDF/A files. Acrobat Professional can be used to digitally sign PDF/A files, and an online search will discover other tools, strategies and software solutions for signing PDF/A files electronically.

21. Can "normal" PDF files be converted to PDF/A?
    PDF files can normally be converted to PDF/A, but PDF supports certain features (such as embedded audio and video) that are not supported by PDF/A. In such a case, it is necessary to remove non-supported features before conversion to PDF/A.

22. Is batch processing possible, for example to create PDF/A files from Microsoft Word?
    Both Acrobat and other software programs can create PDF/A files with batch processing. For example, several files or an entire folder can be processed at a time. An online search will find products that support high volume, automated processing, suitable for businesses and agencies.

23. Can I create PDF/A with Acrobat 6?
    No. Adobe Acrobat 8 Professional version is the first version of Acrobat that fully supports PDF/A.

24. We currently have an extensive digital archive in TIFF-G4. Can these files be converted to PDF/A with a reasonable effort?
    An online search will discover products that are geared toward converting large volumes of files from different formats (including TIFF) into PDF/A.

25. Does PDF/A satisfy the requirement of documents having raised seals or wet ink signatures? Don't some records by law need to be kept in their original form?
    Electronic records are widely admissible in court, but questions regarding the legality of keeping certain records in specific formats should be addressed by the municipal Solicitor.

26. The policy states that controls must be in place to prevent unauthorized physical access to the Security Preservation File. The municipalities do not control access to storage areas such as Google Drive, Microsoft OneDrive, Dropbox.
    Municipalities need to control their own information regardless of who stores it. Their contracts with cloud vendors such as Google or Microsoft should include a requirement that unauthorized physical access to stored data be prevented, and it is likely that the standard contracts of the municipality already include this language.

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27. The policy states that the Security Preservation File needs to be converted from one format to another to avoid technological obsolescence. If the ISO standard says that all PDF/A viewer must be backward compatible, why would a municipality need to convert the file?
It is true that municipalities will *not* need to convert from one version of PDF/A to another PDF/A version. The policy says that the copies should be converted only if necessary ("as required"), to ensure preservation and access. This should not be necessary with records in PDF/A format but is not certain that the goal can be achieved in *every* circumstance for hundreds of years, nor is it certain that PDF/A will remain for *all* time the preservation format of choice. In the unlikely event that a future conversion is performed, the policy requires that the conversion be documented. The same requirement applies to migrations from one operating or storage system to another, which is certain to occur if the records are stored long term.

28. If our municipality implements the PDF/A policy, does it need to send Disposal Requests to the PHMC?
No, the municipality is responsible for ensuring that the policy is implemented correctly and all images are correct before disposing of any paper records that were scanned.

NOTE: It is the municipality's responsibility to talk with your solicitor before implementing any policy.

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These and more can be found on: https://www.pdfa.org/pdfa-faq/