

Advice on the Destruction of Public Records

This Public Records Brief provides advice for public authorities on the process for the destruction of public records. It is issued to assist agencies with their accountability requirements for the disposal of public records under Information Standard 31 – Retention and Disposal of Public Records (IS31).

Under the *Public Records Act 2002*, public authorities have a responsibility to ensure that public records are managed appropriately, and this includes the disposal of such records. IS31 provides advice on the disposal of public records once their minimum retention periods have expired.

Requirements for destruction

Public authorities can only destroy records in accordance with a Retention and Disposal Schedule approved by the State Archivist. Once a public record has reached its date of destruction, and it is not required for any pending legal action or other legislative or business obligation, the process of disposal may take place.

Recordkeeping

The destruction of the file or record should be recorded in the agency's authorised recordkeeping system. The following must be recorded:

- The file title, or a description of the record type or series;
- The number and version of the approved Retention and Disposal Schedule/Authority; and the class reference
- The date range for the records;
- The date of destruction; and
- The authorising officer.

Public authorities are not required to keep a record of destruction if the document is an ephemeral record. See Section 6 of the *General Retention and Disposal Schedule for Administrative Records* for a listing of ephemeral records.

Shredding, pulping and burning

Paper records should be shredded and pulped, or if these options are not available, burnt in an industrial incinerator. Public authorities should not bury records or place records in industrial bins, general collection rubbish bins or other unauthorised storage containers. As a general rule, office shredders should only be utilised for the shredding of ephemeral records, however the method of destruction should be appropriate to the sensitivity of the record and the availability of destruction services in the local area.

Electronic records

Public authorities should ensure that electronic media which contain public records in electronic formats are properly disposed of after the expiration of their minimum retention periods. Processes should be enacted to ensure that the information contained on the media is effectively shredded and irretrievable. The physical destruction of the media should only be considered in respect to floppy disks, CD-ROMS or DVDs.

Storage

Public authorities should utilise secure destruction areas and storage devices to store records awaiting destruction. Only delegated and responsible officers of the public authority or authorised representatives should have access to these areas.

Destruction services

If utilising a destruction service through either a commercial arrangement or another public authority, the public authority responsible for the records should ensure that all documents/records are securely stored and transported to the destruction site. The public authority should also make sure that the service provider destroys the records as soon as possible after their arrival at the designated destruction site. A receipt or certificate of destruction should be obtained from the service provider and retained permanently by the public authority for accountability purposes.

These requirements should be part of the service contract that the public authority signs with the service provider.

Further information

Contact your agency's Information Officer or Records Manager for further information and advice on public records within your agency. See also

<http://www.archives.qld.gov.au/government/InformationStandard31.asp>

For more detailed guidance on the management of public records visit the Queensland State Archives' website at <http://www.archives.qld.gov.au>, or contact staff in our Agency Services unit on:

Telephone: (07) 3131 7777

Email: info@archives.qld.gov.au