STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

Records Retention and Archiving SOP

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Revision	1.0
Owner	Office Manager
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Review cycle	Every 12 months

1. Purpose

To keep business records organized and accessible for as long as they are needed, and to dispose of them securely once retention requirements and business needs no longer apply.

2. Scope

Applies to physical and digital business records company-wide. Specific retention periods are set by company policy, legal counsel and applicable law, and are not fixed in this SOP.

Definitions

Retention schedule	The company's list of record types with how long each must be kept, set with guidance from legal counsel.
Legal hold	An instruction from legal counsel to preserve specific records and suspend their normal destruction because of litigation, investigation or audit.
Record of record	The official, authoritative copy of a document, as distinct from working drafts or duplicate copies.

3. Responsibilities

Records Coordinator	Classifies records, applies the retention schedule, tracks destruction dates and coordinates secure destruction.
Office Manager	Maintains the retention schedule with legal counsel and approves destruction batches.
Department Manager	Confirms departmental records are properly classified and flags records that may be needed longer.
Legal Counsel	Advises on retention periods, issues and lifts legal holds, and approves destruction where required.

RACI matrix

Activity	Records Coordinator	Office Manager	Department Manager	Legal Counsel
Classify records by type	R/A	I	C	-
Maintain the retention schedule	R	A	I	C
Apply and lift a legal hold	R	C	I	A

Activity	Records Coordinator	Office Manager	Department Manager	Legal Counsel
Approve destruction batches	R	A	C	C
Execute secure destruction	R/A	I	-	-

R = Responsible, A = Accountable, C = Consulted, I = Informed

4. Materials and PPE

Materials, tools and systems

- Company retention schedule
- Records inventory or tracking system
- Legal hold notice template
- Secure shredding or destruction vendor
- Digital archive or document management system
- Destruction certificate log

5. Procedure

Step	Task	Owner	Done
5.1	**Classify the record type** When a record is created or received, the records coordinator classifies it by type, such as contract, financial record or personnel file, using the categories in the retention schedule.	Records Coordinator	☐
5.2	**Identify the record of record** The records coordinator identifies which copy is the official record of record for retention purposes, since duplicate drafts and working copies do not need to follow the same schedule.	Records Coordinator	☐
5.3	**Apply the retention period from policy** The records coordinator applies the retention period assigned to that record type in the company's retention schedule, which is set with guidance from legal counsel and kept current with applicable law. **Checkpoint:** The retention period applied matches the current version of the company retention schedule, not a prior version.	Records Coordinator	☐
5.4	**Store the record appropriately** The records coordinator stores physical records in labeled, secure storage and digital records in the document management system, following the department's folder structure and access controls.	Records Coordinator	☐
5.5	**Track the scheduled destruction date** The records coordinator logs the record type, storage location and scheduled destruction date in the records tracking system so nothing is destroyed early or forgotten.	Records Coordinator	☐
5.6	**Review department records periodically** The department manager periodically reviews their team's records against the retention schedule and flags any record that may need to be kept longer than the standard period.	Department Manager	☐

Step	Task	Owner	Done
5.7	**Apply a legal hold when notified** When legal counsel issues a legal hold, the records coordinator immediately suspends destruction of the named records and notifies affected department managers that normal disposal is paused. **Warning:** Never destroy a record under an active legal hold, even if its normal retention period has expired.	Records Coordinator	☐
5.8	**Compile a destruction batch** As records reach the end of their retention period, the records coordinator compiles them into a destruction batch list, excluding anything under legal hold or flagged by a department manager.	Records Coordinator	☐
5.9	**Obtain approval to destroy** The office manager reviews the destruction batch list and approves it, escalating to legal counsel for sign-off where the record type or retention rule requires it. **Checkpoint:** No destruction batch proceeds without a documented approval matching the current retention schedule.	Office Manager	☐
5.10	**Execute secure destruction** The records coordinator arranges secure destruction of approved physical records through the shredding vendor and permanent deletion of approved digital records from the archive.	Records Coordinator	☐
5.11	**Log the destruction certificate** The records coordinator files the destruction certificate or deletion confirmation, listing what was destroyed and when, in the destruction log for audit purposes.	Records Coordinator	☐
5.12	**Respond to a record request** When a department or external party requests a record, the records coordinator locates it in storage or the archive, confirms the requester is authorized, and provides it following company policy.	Records Coordinator	☐

6. Quality checks

- Every stored record is classified against the current retention schedule.
- No record under an active legal hold appears on a destruction batch list.
- Every destruction batch has documented approval before destruction occurs.
- Destruction certificates are on file for every executed destruction batch.

7. Records

- Records inventory with classification and destruction dates
- Legal hold notices
- Approved destruction batch lists
- Destruction certificates

8. KPIs

- Percentage of records classified within the retention schedule categories
- Number of records destroyed on schedule versus overdue
- Time to respond to an internal or external record request

9. Common mistakes

- Destroying a record without checking for an active legal hold.
- Applying an outdated version of the retention schedule.
- Letting expired records pile up without a destruction batch process.
- Treating a working draft as the official record of record.

10. Revision history

Revision	Date	Description	Reviewed by
1.0	September 15, 2026	Initial release	Alexa Uskova

Approval

Prepared by	Approved by	Date

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