

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE
WASHINGTON, DC

FSIS NOTICE

31-17

6/7/17

ANNUAL REMINDER FOR RECORDS MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

I. PURPOSE

This notice serves as a reminder that records management is the responsibility of all FSIS employees, contractors, volunteers, and political appointees as required by [44 U.S.C. Chapter 36, Section 1220.34](#). In addition, this notice provides frequently asked questions and answers to clarify records management responsibilities and e-mail.

II. BACKGROUND

A. In accordance with the [Federal Records Act of 1950](#), FSIS employees are to preserve records that reflect Agency functions, policies, decisions, procedures, and operations and documents that serve as evidence of the Agency's accomplishments and activities. Official [Agency Record Retention and Disposition Schedules](#) are located on the FSIS Intranet.

B. FSIS has issued [FSIS Directive 2620.1 Rev. 5](#), *FSIS Records Management Program*, which sets forth requirements and responsibilities for implementing and maintaining an efficient and economical records management program in accordance with law and regulations. The Office of Management (OM), Office of Administrative Services (OAS), Records Management Staff, manages the FSIS records management program.

III. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

A. Frequently Asked Questions About Records Management:

1. **Question:** *What is a record?*

Answer: The basic definition is found in the Federal Records Act. Records are defined as "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 ([44 U.S.C. Chapter 36, Section 1220.34](#)) and needed to document Agency activities or actions."

2. **Question:** *What are my records responsibilities?*

Answer: FSIS employees are to create the records necessary to document the activities for which they are responsible, file those records in a manner that allows for them to be safely stored and efficiently retrieved when necessary, and dispose of records in accordance with Agency and Federal regulations.

DISTRIBUTION: Electronic; All
Field Employees

NOTICE EXPIRES: 6/1/18

OPI: OPPD

3. **Question: How long must I keep FSIS records?**

Answer: FSIS records are to be kept in accordance with a National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) approved Records Schedules or the [Agency Record Retention and Disposition Schedules](#). In the case of legal and litigation holds, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, or audits, all documents (record and non-record materials) cannot be destroyed or deleted until legal or litigation holds are lifted, FOIA requests are filled, or audits are completed. Once all actions are completed, records will continue to follow existing records control schedules.

4. **Question: What about permanent records? What do I do with them?**

Answer: Permanent records have been deemed by the Archivist of the United States to have sufficient historical or other value to warrant their continued preservation by the U.S. Government (i.e., FSIS directives, significant investigative reports, historical publications, Administrator speeches, FSIS food safety campaigns). To determine if records are permanent or temporary, please consult [Agency Record Retention and Disposition Schedules](#). If according to the Agency records schedule your records are permanent and they are no longer needed, please follow the disposition instructions in the schedule, and contact the FSIS Records Management Staff (see section IV).

5. **Question: What about non-records? What do I do with them?**

Answer: Employees are to promptly dispose of non-record materials (paper and electronic) and e-mail messages that are no longer needed for reference. Messages or attachments that are the subject of Congressional, FOIA, or discovery requests, or that are needed for litigation, are considered records and are not to be deleted.

6. **Question: Can I take copies of Federal records with me when I leave FSIS?**

Answer: Only if the removal of these copies is approved by FSIS Records Officials and will not diminish the official records of FSIS, and if the records do not include information that is security classified, subject to the Privacy Act, or otherwise prohibited from release. If unsure, consult with your Agency Records Officer.

7. **Question: Can I remove my personal files?**

Answer: You may remove personal files at your discretion without Agency permission. Personal files are those documentary materials maintained in Federal offices that belong to an individual because they relate solely to an individual's own affairs or are used exclusively for that individual's convenience and were not used in the transaction of Government business.

8. **Question: Does records management only apply to paper?**

Answer: No. A record can be any physical format: microfilm, videotape, maps, photographs, electronic records (word processing, spreadsheets, shared drives, etc.), or other media, including email, instant messaging, text messaging, telephone messages, voicemail messages, websites, social media, and Microsoft Lync messages.

B. Frequently Asked Questions About E-mail:

1. **Question: What is an e-mail message?**

Answer: An e-mail message consists of any text or document created, transmitted, or

received on an e-mail system, including message text and any attachments, such as word processing documents, spreadsheets, and graphics that may be transmitted with a message.

2. **Question: *When are e-mails considered records?***

Answer: E-mails are records when they are created or received in the transaction of agency business; are appropriate for preservation as evidence of the government's function and activities; or are valuable because of the information they contain.

3. **Question: *When are e-mails not considered records?***

Answer: E-mails are not records when they provide no evidence of agency functions and activities; lack information related to Agency business; and duplicate information already documented in existing records.

4. **Question: *Can I delete FSIS e-mails?***

Answer: Yes, but before deleting an e-mail, first determine whether it is a Federal record. If it is determined to be a Federal record, you must follow the guidelines set forth in [FSIS Directive 2620.1 Rev. 5](#).

IV. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

A. For additional information regarding records management please contact the Office of Administrative Services, Records Management Staff at RecordsandMail@fsis.usda.gov.

B. Employees may access Records Retention and Disposition schedules and the FSIS Records Handbook on [InsideFSIS](#).



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