

What is the purpose of this guidance?

This provides a guide for managing email messages and helps the user understand the general types of email records that must be kept and the ones that need to be deleted.

Why is this important?

All public records, regardless of media, are subject to strict retention and disclosure requirements. Records exist in multiple places, variable media, and multiple copies.

Even though all of this is a public record, you may not need to keep it long term. It should be discarded according to the correct retention schedules. First, you determine if you need to keep something, then consult the retention schedule to identify the time period for that record series.

What is not covered by this guidance?

This tip sheet does not provide individual retention schedule guidance. To find retention schedules, go to: [Records & Information Management's webpage \(Internal Link\)](#).

This also does not discuss which agency records are subject to public disclosure. As with any other request for public records, the records must be provided and reviewed on a case-by-case basis to determine if the records or any of the content is exempt from disclosure.

Still have questions?

Contact [Records and Information Management \(RIM\) \(Internal Link\)](#).

All public records, regardless of media, are subject to the same strict retention and disclosure legal requirements. Email messages used to conduct WSDOT business are public records. Because there are so many different business processes, there are many different uses of email and it can be hard to separate "junk" messages from public records needing to be kept and managed along with all the other records in the department. As always, think about a messages' context and function.

The agency wants the emails that do not need to be kept to be deleted from the system. Do not keep them. Because there is a cost to store, a cost to search and a cost to review junk, this is a waste of resources and staff time.

What type of messages do I have to save?

- Instructions, guidance, or procedures, if:
 - You are the sender, or
 - You receive it and it causes you to do something.
- Policy, policy development, or policy implementation.
- Information regarding a permit, project, program, or transaction if you are the lead.
- Input received on a draft document, project or decision making process, if:
 - It is "significant" and needed for the official record (see [Tip 1-7](#)), or
 - It is received from outside the agency
- Your input to a draft document or project paper, if you are doing it as part of a separate WSDOT business function and need to document your own requirements.
- Anything related to or documenting department business, the decision-making process or your program's business process
- Anything you received from outside WSDOT related to your work

What types of messages need to be deleted?

As a public agency, the only records that don't have a retention value and therefore do not have to be kept are covered by very specific records retention schedules under the [State General Records Retention Schedule](#) (GS). The schedules are found in Sections 1.4 and Section 50, but below is a summary of examples. Consult your office's retention schedule for more details.

- Obvious non-records: non-business and personal messages, "junk" and spam message, and commercial mail, like catalogs and sale flyers, conference announcements, etc.
- Reference files - [GS 09002](#)

Records with Minimum Retention Value - [GS Section 50](#)

- Transitory Records: records with temporary value that are not needed as evidence of business
 - Miscellaneous notes with no legal or fiscal value
 - Preliminary drafts
 - Routing slips and transmittal memos without attachments
 - Copies of inter- or intra-agency memoranda, bulletins, or directives of a general information and non-continuing nature
 - Handwritten notes typed into "official" format
 - Telephone message transmitted via email that are not needed as evidence
 - Letters of transmittal which do not add any information to the transmitted materials
- Information-only copies or documents distributed for reference or convenience, such as announcements or bulletins
- Agency information like business hours, meeting dates and times, locations, etc.
- Copies of published materials and blank forms
- Secondary copies where the record or data exists in "official" form somewhere else such as data printouts when the official data is born and managed electronically