

# Myths in Records Management

## MYTH #10: IT'S TOO HARD! (Well, not really a myth—more of an excuse)

### Answer:

It's not easy; if that was the case we wouldn't be in this situation! Using that as an excuse will not save you money, make you more efficient, or make a judge more sympathetic.

It has taken some time for those icebergs to build up (although they are picking up speed and increasing more rapidly). It will take time and effort to chip it down to a more manageable size.

Some different *thought* processes are required as well as different strategies and tools to get the iceberg under control, and then ongoing strategies and processes have to be put into place to keep that iceberg from growing to such massive proportions ever again.

It's not easy because the structures, controls and systems in place back in the day of paper have disappeared along with the "dragon ladies" and central files.

***Not all records are created equal, nor will they have equal value as an asset to the organization when it comes to meeting the evidentiary needs of the business and legal obligations.***

Say your agency is the business of granting permits. We've gone from typewriters to desktops to mobile devices in a very short period of time (not to mention adding databases/systems to the mix), but your *core mission is still to issue permits*. A permit may look and feel different than in days gone by, but the business needs and legal requirements surrounding that process have remained largely unchanged.

The reasons to keep records will generally fall under these categories:

### **Support of business processes and administrative operations:**

**Most importantly of all**, staff needs to keep records and information to perform their jobs effectively and efficiently and provide for the continued operations of the agency.

Field staff may need to access information from the two previous permits they issued to an entity in order to approve a new one. Retention and business requirements will support keeping previous records only for as long as necessary, and then take the steps to get rid of the superseded record once the business need/obligation has been met. This is an effective business process, and no reason to reinvent the wheel each

time a permit is issued, and no reason to keep the two prior ones to clutter things up once need has been met.

### **Legal needs/obligations or regulatory requirements:**

A lot of rules, statutes and accountability requirements apply to local, state, and federal governments. Some records are evidence that an agency needs to keep demonstrating that their business and legal obligations and requirements are met.

Ever go through an audit? What does the auditor look for? Proof and evidence in the form of records. Some records are required to defend or protect an agency's actions in court or some other legal process. While some of these records may have a fairly short internal business or legal need or statute of limitations involved, many may have other long-term or permanent external retention requirements.

### **Historic/cool stuff:**

Every agency has a history of its establishment and development, and each undergoes changes. This history needs to be preserved for future generations. Sometimes a significant event occurs like the Mt. St. Helen's eruption that makes records historic when they might not otherwise be under normal business circumstances, and sometimes certain things are just plain "cool". What is "cool" is a subjective call to be made by an experienced archivist so ask, don't assume! If you think something meets the "cool" requirement, talk to your agency records officer *first*, and they can contact the State Archives for a final determination.

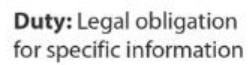
## **FINALLY**

While records management is not the "magic bullet" that will solve *everything* or cure the common cold, but it sure helps and once implemented, the other problems (and those pesky icebergs) will diminish accordingly – and it will definitely improve business processes and reflect true "Lean" principles at work.

We will *always* have business and legal obligations, we will *always* have audits, we will *always* have the public wanting accountability and access to government information. Records management *always* supports compliance to all of the above, and then some.

Getting your records and informational house in order needs to be one of the top priorities as part of an overall information governance strategy. Records are at the core of the mission of the agency, and provide for continuity and link the other strategic functions of government.

Linking duty + value to information asset = efficient, effective management



**Asset:** Specific container of information

## ARCHIE ARCHIVE SAYS RECORDS MANAGEMENT IS EVERYONE'S JOB

