

SOP: Record Retention Timeframe and Storage Protocols

This SOP details **record retention timeframe and storage protocols**, outlining the duration for which various records must be retained, the methods for secure and organized storage, and procedures for proper disposal when retention periods expire. The goal is to ensure compliance with legal requirements, maintain data integrity, and facilitate easy retrieval of important documents while safeguarding sensitive information.

1. Purpose

To establish guidelines and procedures for the retention, storage, and disposal of organizational records to meet legal, regulatory, and operational requirements.

2. Scope

This SOP applies to all employees and departments responsible for creating, handling, storing, and disposing of official records, in either physical or digital format.

3. Definitions

- **Record:** Any document or information, physical or electronic, maintained as evidence of activities, transactions, or decisions.
- **Retention Period:** The minimum required time to retain specific records before eligible for disposal.
- **Secure Storage:** Storage (physical or digital) that protects records from unauthorized access, loss, or damage.
- **Disposal:** The process of destroying records after the retention period has expired, ensuring sensitive information is unrecoverable.

4. Responsibilities

- **Record Owners:** Ensure accurate classification, storage, and retrieval of records within their department or functional area.
- **Information Technology (IT):** Maintain secure digital storage and backup for electronic records.
- **Compliance Officer:** Monitor adherence to retention policies and relevant legal requirements.
- **Employees:** Follow procedures for record handling, storage, and disposal as outlined in this SOP.

5. Record Retention Timeframes

Record Type	Retention Period	Responsible Department
Financial Records (e.g. invoices, ledgers)	7 Years	Finance
HR Records (e.g. personnel files, payroll)	7 Years after termination	Human Resources
Client Contracts	7 Years after completion/termination	Legal
Compliance/Regulatory Records	As specified by law/regulations	Compliance
Email Correspondence	2 Years	All departments
Project Documentation	5 Years after project completion	Project Management

** Refer to specific laws/regulations for applicable records not listed above.*

6. Storage Protocols

6.1. Physical Records

- Store in secure, access-controlled locations (e.g., locked cabinets, archive rooms).
- Label files clearly with content description and retention expiration date.
- Maintain restricted access; only authorized personnel may access sensitive records.

6.2. Electronic Records

- Store on secure, backed-up servers or approved cloud storage with encryption.
- Use document management systems for indexing, classification, and controlled access.
- Implement regular data backup schedules and test data restoration procedures.
- Restrict access through user authentication and permissions.

7. Record Disposal Procedures

1. Verify the expiry of the retention period before initiating disposal process.
2. Obtain necessary approvals as per organizational hierarchy or department policy.
3. **Physical Records:**
 - Shred or incinerate documents containing confidential information.
 - Recycle non-confidential records securely where possible.
4. **Electronic Records:**
 - Permanently delete files from all storage systems, including backups if applicable.
 - Use certified data destruction software where appropriate.
5. Maintain a log of all records disposed, including type, quantity, and method of destruction.

8. Compliance and Review

- The Compliance Officer shall conduct periodic audits to ensure adherence to this SOP.
- This SOP is to be reviewed and updated annually or when regulatory/operational changes occur.

9. Appendix

For detailed retention schedules or lists of record types, refer to [Appendix A: Organizational Record Retention Schedule](#).