

Recordkeeping for Good Governance Toolkit

GUIDELINE 8: Implementing the Disposal Schedule for Common Administrative Functions





The original version of this guideline was prepared by the Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (PARBICA) for use by countries around the Pacific. This means that the guideline may refer to things that you are not familiar with or do not use in your country. For example, not all governments have an auditor-general who reviews the financial and other records of government departments. You may find that you need to change some of the advice in this guideline to suit your own government's arrangements. To obtain an editable copy of this guideline, contact the national archives, public record office or other records authority in your country, or contact PARBICA at <http://www.parbica.org>.





CONTENTS

How to use the Disposal Schedule	1
Implementing the Disposal Schedule	2
Applying the Disposal Schedule to existing records	2
Records to which more than one disposal action applies	5
Applying the Disposal Schedule to records when they are created	7
Activating retention periods and disposal actions	9
Example internal disposal authority form	11



HOW TO USE THE DISPOSAL SCHEDULE

This document provides guidance for implementing *Guideline 7: Disposal Schedule for Common Administrative Functions*.

Guideline 7 Disposal Schedule for Common Administrative Functions can be used to decide retention periods and disposal actions **for files that document the administrative or support functions that every government Ministry carries out**.

The schedule should not be used by Departments or Ministries in disposing of records which document their responsibilities in providing services to the whole of government (records of core business). For example, a Ministry of Finance can use the schedule to dispose of the Ministry's own internal financial records, but cannot apply the same rules to records about its monitoring of all government financial dealings.

Guideline 10: Starting an Appraisal Programme provides advice about the steps for disposal of core records.

Before you start using the Disposal Schedule, you need to confirm that it has been authorised for use by the relevant authority within your country. Contact your National Archives or Records authority if you are uncertain about your authorisation to use this schedule.

Applying the Disposal Schedule to non-current records is a process called **implementing**, or sometimes **sentencing**. It consists of deciding the disposal actions and retention periods for specific records according to what classes in the schedule the records belong to, and then implementing (activating) the disposal actions as required (archive or destroy).

IMPLEMENTING THE DISPOSAL SCHEDULE

Implementing the Disposal Schedule, or **sentencing**, is the process of identifying and classifying records according to the schedule and applying the retention periods and disposal action specified in it.

The Disposal Schedule can be used to sentence existing records and to identify the future retention and disposal of newly created records.

Although retention periods and disposal actions are only actively applied to records that are inactive (closed), you can assign retention periods and disposal actions to records as you create them, so that their future disposal is known from the beginning of their existence. In other words you can tag them when they are created for future retention and disposal action when they have become inactive.

APPLYING THE DISPOSAL SCHEDULE TO EXISTING RECORDS

It is easier to apply the Disposal Schedule to well organised records systems than to poorly organised records systems. Even though the Disposal Schedule has defined classes and record types, the records you are applying it to must still be identified before the classes can be applied to them, and it is easier to identify records that have good file titles.

This usually means that records must be listed before the Disposal Schedule can be applied to them. You can use existing lists or a control index (if you have one). If records have not already been listed, then they should be listed in such a way that their contents can be understood from the file title or description (it is not very easy to decide what the disposal class is for records titled 'General' or 'Miscellaneous').

Because the Schedule applies to records both within and outside the 'official' filing systems, it is sometimes useful to do an inventory of all existing records, especially if there are not existing lists, or the lists are not comprehensive. Then even the records that are not yet inactive (closed) can have their retention periods and disposal actions identified.

Steps to performing an inventory/creating a list:

1. Decide the level at which you will create the inventory. It may be to item level for some types of records or at 'accumulation' level for others. For example, correspondence files must be listed file by file, but financial records such as invoices could simply be listed by box or shelf, so long as the date range and quantity were accurately provided. (For example 'Invoices, 1987 – 1999, 3 linear metres [7 boxes]').
2. You should not list records document by document. The lowest level of listing should be at file/folder/box level.
3. Design a records inventory form, bearing in mind that different levels of description may be required for different types of records.
4. Develop a methodology for locating and listing all records. The methodology should cover areas such as:
 - Who should list
 - Supervision of listers
 - How to locate the records

- How to list
 - What details to list
 - Checking of completed lists
 - How to amend lists.
5. Perform a physical inventory of all possible records storage areas – file cabinets, shelves, basements, under stairs, in individual offices, storage rooms, odd corners.
 6. Use the form to gather information about type of record, volume, creating department/team, and other descriptive information.

Once the inventory list is completed, review it using the Schedule and apply the Schedule classes to the lists of records. This means going through the list and consulting the schedule, and identifying what retention period and disposal class applies to each line in the list.

You must calculate the actual retention period for each existing record, using the retention period column in the Disposal Schedule. A retention period is applied to a record from the date of the last action/last paper on the file. The date of last paper plus the retention period equals the disposal date.

Sometimes retention periods are applied from the date the file was closed. Sometimes, however, the date the file is officially closed can be several years after the date of the last paper on the file. This means that the record may be kept longer than its actual retention period. It is preferable to use the date of last paper as the date from which to calculate the retention period, but if the papers in the file have no dates, then you can use the date the file was closed.

The retention period should be at the year level or the month and year level– it is not necessary to have day/month/year. For example a file that has a date of last paper of 29 May 2007 and a retention period of seven years, will have a disposal date of May 2014.

Steps to applying the Disposal Schedule to a list

1	Ask these questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>What is the record called?</i> ▪ <i>What is the record about?</i> ▪ <i>What processes caused the record to be created or received?</i> ▪ <i>Who is using or will use the record?</i>
2	Check the activity, description, and examples to see what best fits the record
3	On the list, add the reference number of the disposal class, the retention period, the disposal action and the disposal date (when the disposal action will happen) [this is called ‘marking up’ the list].
4	Mark the disposal action and the disposal date on the records in pencil, along with the disposal class reference number. For example, a file due for destruction in 7 years time could be marked with ‘D7’, and the reference code.

See the example ‘marked up’ list on the next page.

Example of Marked up List

File Reference	File Title	Date first paper on file	Date last paper on file	Disposal Action	Retention Period	Disposal Date	Disposal Reference
03-01-01	Finance: Accounting: Creditors: A-F	1/06/1996	30/05/1997	D	7 years after date of last action	2004	DS3/1.1
03-01-02	Finance: Accounting: Creditors: F-Q	1/06/1996	30/05/1997	D	7 years after date of last action	2004	DS3/1.1
03-01-03	Finance: Accounting: Creditors: R-z	1/06/1996	30/05/1997	D	7 years after date of last action	2004	DS3/1.1
03-02-01	Finance: Auditing: Planning	1/03/1997	30/03/1997	D	7 years after date of last action	2004	DS3/2.1
03-02-02	Finance: Auditing: Reporting	1/06/1996	30/08/1997	D	7 years after date of last action	2004	DS3/2.3
03-08-01	Finance: Budget Management: Budget Proposals	01/07/2005	30/6/2006	A	7 years after date of last action	2013	DS3/5.2
03-09-01	Finance: Financial Reporting: Reporting to Treasury	01/11/1999	30/06/2000	D	7 years after date of last action	2007	DS3/9.1
03-10-01	Finance: Policy and Procedure: Policy Working Papers	01/04/1995	31/12/1995	D	7 years after date of last action	2002	DS3/15.1
03-10-02	Finance: Policy and Procedure: Finance Manual Working Papers	01/02/1972	2/10/1999	D	7 years after date of last action	2006	DS3/15.1
01-02-03	Asset and Resources Management: Disposal: Furniture	01/06/2002	30/08/2007	D	1 year after date of last action	2008	DS1/3.1
01-05-01	Asset and Resources Management: Maintenance and Operation: Land	01/08/1992	30/09/2004	A	10 years after date of last action	2014	DS1/6.2
01-05-01	Asset and Resources Management: Vehicles: Maintenance	01/10/1995	30/03/2001	D	5 years after date of last action	2006	DS1/5.1

RECORDS TO WHICH MORE THAN ONE DISPOSAL ACTION APPLIES

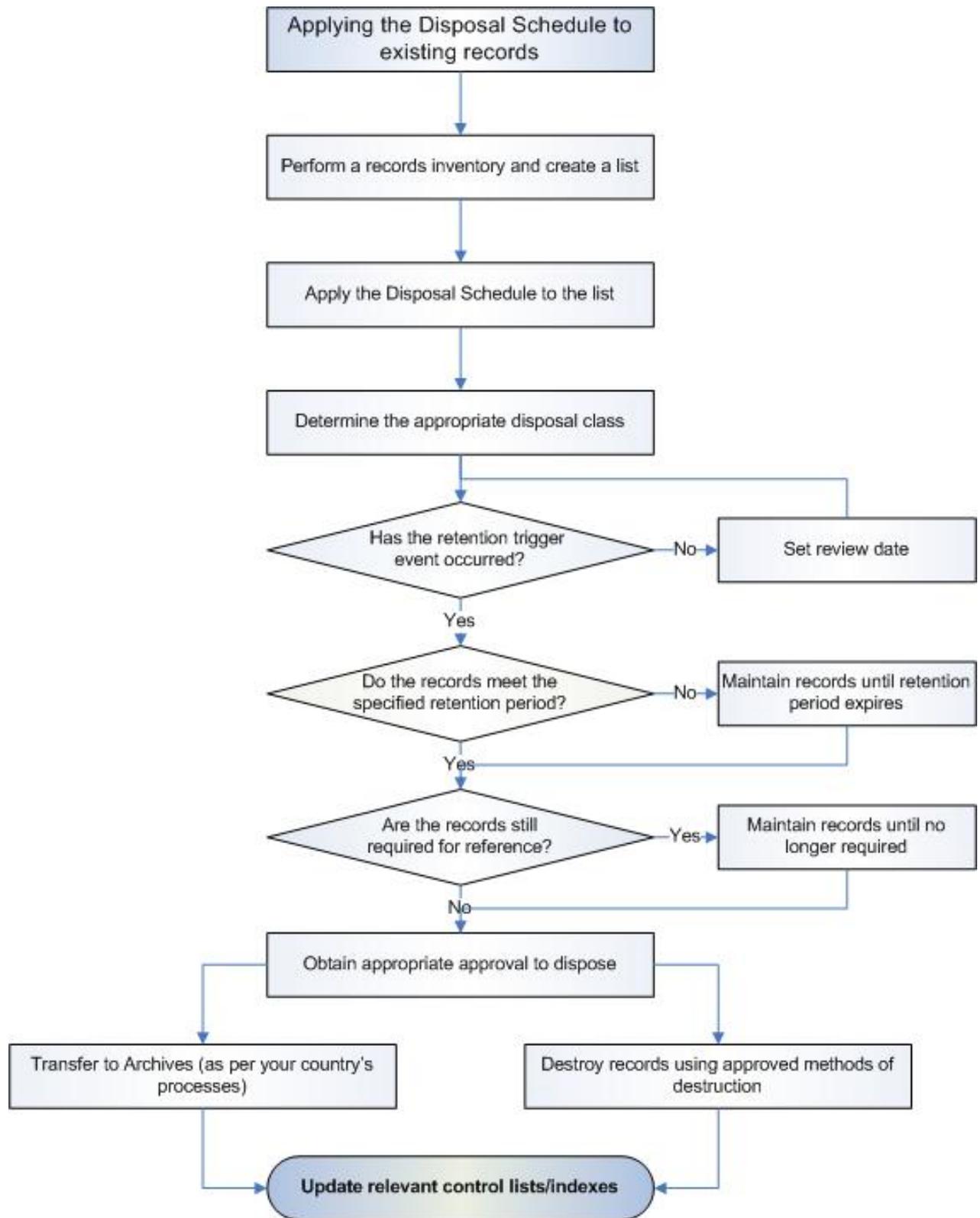
It sometimes happens that records may contain a mixture of some information that is scheduled for destruction and other information that is scheduled for retention as archives. An example of this is records of working groups or advisory committees which contain both the documents of long-term value (minutes, agendas, etc) and the low-value administrative information (e.g. arranging venues and catering).

In this case, the 'highest' disposal action applies – that is, the records should be retained as archives.

You **should not** 'cull' or 'weed' records to remove the low value information. This is very time-consuming work and it also affects the integrity of the record. It is better to retain the whole record even though some of the information it is of lower value.

In the same manner, records that contain documents that have more than one retention period (e.g. three years for some documents and seven years for others) should have **the longest retention period** applied.

In other words, a disposal action of **Archives** always supersedes one of Destroy and the longest retention period is always the one that should be used.



APPLYING THE DISPOSAL SCHEDULE TO RECORDS WHEN THEY ARE CREATED

It is good practice to have a records programme in which files are systematically created, recorded and managed, and where disposal occurs regularly.

Although retention periods and disposal actions are only actively applied to records that are inactive, you can assign retention periods and disposal actions to records as you create them, so that their future disposal is known from the beginning of their existence. In other words you can tag them when they are created for future retention and destruction action when they finally become inactive.

The application of the Disposal Schedule to records as they are created will only be successful if there is some kind of formal records programme in place. If users of records simply create records as and when they need them without a formal system, and there is no centralised or semi-centralised management of the records, it will be difficult for the Disposal Schedule to be applied as records are created.

However if there is centralised management of records, or even if the creation and management of records has been devolved to each group, so long as there is a formal process of records creation, then the Disposal Schedule may be applied.

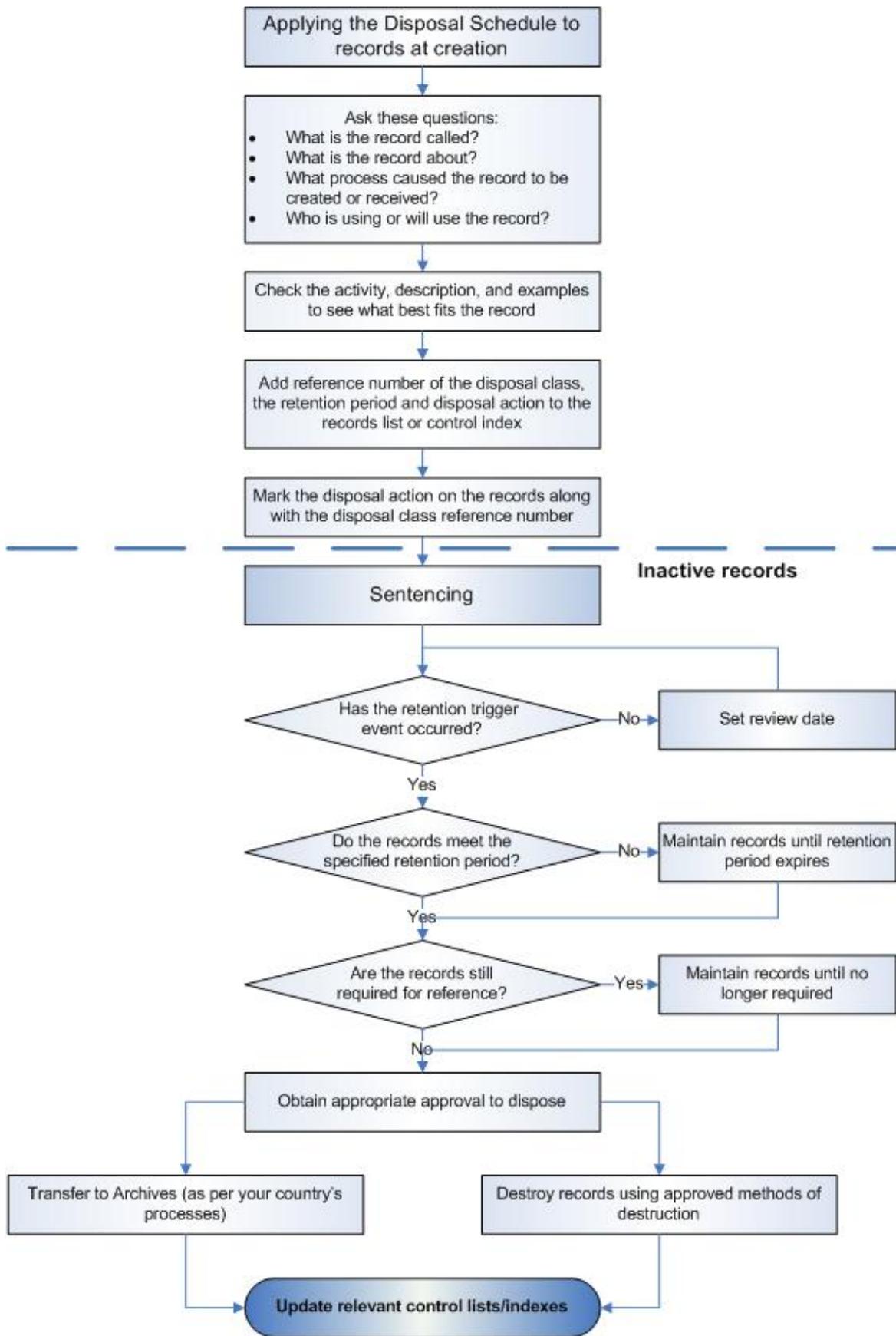
When a new file is created, the person who is responsible for records will identify the disposal class it belongs to using the same process described earlier.

Each disposal class has a reference code - a reference such as DS1/1.1, DS1/2.1, etc - which relates to the disposal class and therefore to the retention period to be applied when the file or record becomes inactive and/or is closed. It is simply a code to put onto the physical file, and to add into the records list or control index.

The main difference between applying the Disposal Schedule to existing records and to newly created records, is that you do not know the *actual disposal date of the newly created records*. That has to wait until the record becomes inactive. But you will know the retention period and the disposal action, so that when the record does become inactive, it is a simple action to calculate the disposal date.

Steps to applying the Disposal Schedule to a newly created record

1	Ask these questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ <i>What is the record called?</i>▪ <i>What is the record about?</i>▪ <i>What processes caused the record to be created or received?</i>▪ <i>Who is using or will use the record?</i>
2	Check the activity, description, and examples to see what best fits the record
3	On the records list or in the control index, add the reference number of the disposal class, the retention period, the disposal action.
4	Mark the disposal action and the disposal date on the records in pencil, along with the disposal class reference number. For example, a file due for destruction in 7 years time could be marked with 'D7', and the reference code.



ACTIVATING RETENTION PERIODS AND DISPOSAL ACTIONS

MANAGING DISPOSAL ACTIONS

It is recommended that disposal of records is carried out once a year. It may be useful to carry out disposal activity every December so that all records due for disposal in that year are past their retention period.

RECORDS DUE FOR DISPOSAL

When you implement the Disposal Schedule for the first time on existing records, you may find that you have records that have been closed for some time and that are ready to have the disposal actions applied (that is, they have already been kept for as long as the appropriate retention period). If this is the case then you can apply the disposal actions, including seeking authority to dispose. See the section below on **Activating Disposal Actions**.

RECORDS NOT YET DUE FOR DISPOSAL

If you have existing records that have not yet completed their retention periods, then you must ensure that they are retained for the appropriate period, and that your lists clearly identify **retention period, disposal date, disposal action and location of the records**.

The disposal action and the disposal date should be marked on the records in pencil, along with the disposal class reference number.

ACTIVATING DISPOSAL ACTIONS

When records have reached their disposal date (date of last paper plus retention period) it is time to activate the disposal action; that is, to arrange for either the transfer to Archives or the destruction of the records.

AUTHORITY FOR DISPOSAL ACTION TO TAKE PLACE

This document has already discussed having authorised approval for the whole Disposal Schedule. It is also important to have an authorisation process for disposal actions. Records should not be destroyed or transferred to the National Archives without authorisation from an appropriate representative of the users of the records.

For a whole of government Disposal Schedule, the authority could be the Chief Executive, or Departmental Head of each government organisation. If this is not possible, the lowest level of authority should be Manager of the functional area that has created and used the records (for example, the Manager of the Finance Division).

There is an example disposal authorisation form at the end of this document.

There are standard steps to activating disposal actions:

1. Identify the records that are ready for disposal
2. List the records ready for disposal
3. Check if the users of the records are still working with the records
4. Obtain approval for disposal

IDENTIFYING THE RECORDS READY FOR DISPOSAL

Adding the disposal date to your lists when you apply the Disposal Schedule to records means that you can easily identify those records that are due for disposal.

If you have a paper list, you must read through it and identify all the records with a disposal date that is ready to activate. (For example, if it is December 2012, then you would look for all records with a disposal date of 2012).

LISTING THE RECORDS

You should list all the records ready for disposal. The minimum information you should have on the list are file reference, file titles, first date, last date and disposal action.

CHECKING ON THE USE OF THE RECORDS

Show the list to the users of the records and ask if there are reasons why any of them should not be disposed. It is possible that a record that is ready for disposal is still being used for reference purposes because of a specific case or event. It is acceptable to defer disposal until a record is no longer required for reference.

This consultation should not be used as an opportunity for users to try to change the disposal actions of records (for example from Destroy to Archive). Remember that the Disposal Schedule has been agreed to and authorised with the recommended disposal actions. It is simply a chance for them to let you know which records they might still be using for reference.

If anyone wants to keep a record after the retention period is completed, negotiate with the staff member a new disposal date for the record

GETTING APPROVAL FOR THE DISPOSAL ACTION

Once the list has been circulated and any comments have been received, then the list should be finalised and you should get approval from the designated person for the disposal action to take place. This means that someone in authority has signed off that it is agreed that the listed records are destroyed or transferred to Archives.

PREPARING RECORDS FOR TRANSFER TO ARCHIVES

Your country's National Archives or similar body will have specific instructions about the listing, boxing and transfer of the records to their custody, which you should follow.

You should keep a list of the records you have transferred and you should also keep any paperwork associated with the transfer, such as a transfer or deposit agreement.

DESTRUCTION

It is important to keep lists of destroyed records and any destruction certificate that might be provided by the agency that destroyed the records on your behalf. These lists are evidence that the records were destroyed at a certain date and time, and provide certainty that they were really destroyed and are not lost somewhere.

The most typical forms of destruction of physical records are burning or shredding. **It is not appropriate to destroy records by including them in office rubbish removal or simply placing them in paper recycling bins.** Secure destruction processes should always ensure that there is no unauthorised access to the records at any point before the actual destruction.

EXAMPLE INTERNAL DISPOSAL AUTHORITY FORM

POSITION:

NAME:

I authorise the destruction/transfer to Archives under the Disposal Schedule for Common Administrative Functions of the records listed below

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF RECORDS

See attached list of _ pages





This Guideline of the *Recordkeeping for Good Governance Toolkit* was produced by the Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives with assistance from Archives New Zealand and NZAID.