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Government of the Hong Kong
Special Administrative Region

28 December 2006

General Circular No. 5/2006

Management of Government Records

(Note: Distribution of this Circular is Scale C. It should be brought to the attention of officers who, because of the functions of their posts, are required to take action on, or to be informed of, the Circular.)

        This Circular reminds heads of bureaux and departments the importance of proper management of government records and draws their attention to good records management practices.

Proper Records Management

2.   Records are valuable resources of the Government to support evidence-based decision-making, meet operational and regulatory requirements and are essential for an open and accountable government. Good records management enhances operational efficiency and effectiveness while minimizing costs.

3.   A service-wide Records Management Strategy was devised in the late 90s to help bureaux and departments improve the quality and efficiency of records service, control growth of paper records, reduce records stock and improve cost effectiveness in records management. Building on that strategy, we issued the Records Management Manual in 2001 to set out the code of best practices for the proper management of government records. After a lapse of five years, we see a need to remind colleagues of the key principles and features in our records management strategy and manual, as highlighted below –

> (a)   each bureau and department should designate a **Departmental Records Manager** to oversee its records management programme. Staff members should understand their respective records management responsibilities;

(b)   records should be systematically organized by way of a logical **filing scheme** to facilitate access and retrieval. While bureaux and departments can compile their own filing schemes for their unique programme records, they should organize common administrative records in line with the standard classification scheme designed by the Government Records Service (GRS);

(c)   **records retention and disposal schedules** should be drawn up and reviewed every five years to assist timely disposal of unwanted records;

(d)   bureaux and departments are reminded to seek the **prior consent** of the Government Records Service Director before they destroy and dispose of any government records;

(e)   records appraised to have **archival value** should be transferred to the Public Records Office of GRS;

(f)   **inactive records** (i.e. those with a low retrieval rate) should be stored off-site in low rental premises such as the records centres operated by GRS or microfilmed with the assistance of GRS; and

(g)   vital records should be **protected** by way of duplication or off-site storage to ensure uninterrupted operation of major business functions.

— A gist of the good records management practices is at **Appendix I**. The Records Management Manual and relevant records management publications (as listed in
— **Appendix II**) can be accessed at CCGO website: http://grs.host.ccgo.hksarg/.

Management of Electronic Mail

4.   We promulgated on 10 October 2001 the Guideline on the Management of Electronic Mail to help bureaux and departments identify, create, file and manage e-mail records so that sufficient and accurate evidence of official business and activities will be retained for legal, operational, accountability and archival purposes. Colleagues are reminded to adhere to the Guideline, also available at the afore-mentioned CCGO website.

Support Services on Records Management

5.   GRS provides a range of services to assist bureaux and departments to improve records management. These include –

(a)   guidelines and procedures on records management;

(b)   records management training and advice;

(c)   records appraisal to determine retention requirements;

(d)   services and facilities for the intermediate storage of inactive records and permanent storage of records of archival value;

(e)   microfilming services including advice on microfilming, microfilming of source documents, microfilm storage facilities and disposal of filmed source documents and microfilm; and

(f)   study on electronic records management through a pilot project on electronic record-keeping system.

— The responsible officers for these services are listed at **Appendix III**.

Enquiries

6.   Enquiries on this Circular may be addressed to the Government Records Service Director at 2195 7781 or to relevant officers covered in Appendix 'III.

(Miss Elizabeth Tse)
Director of Administration

c.c. Judiciary Administrator

Good Records Management Practices
(summarized from the Records Management Manual (RMM)
and records management publications)

Benefits of good records management [para. 101 of RMM]

1.   Good records management under a comprehensive records management programme can bring the following benefits -

(a)   accurate and complete documentation of the policies, procedures, decisions, functions, activities and transactions of the Government;

(b)   effective control of the quality and quantity of government records;

(c)   streamlining activities, systems and processes of the creation, distribution, use, maintenance and disposal of records for efficient and cost-effective operation of the Government; and

(d)   adequate and proper identification, protection and preservation of records valuable to the Government and the community.

Definition of records, records management and record-keeping system [paras. 105, 115 and 402 of RMM]

2.   A record is any recorded information or data in any physical format or media created or received by an organization during its course of official business and kept as **evidence** of policies, decisions, procedures, functions, activities and transactions.

3.   Records management refers to the planning, directing, organizing, controlling, reviewing, training and other managerial activities involved with respect to the creation, classification and indexing, distribution, handling, use, tracking, storage, retrieval, protection and disposal of records to achieve adequate and proper documentation of an organization's policies, decisions and transactions as well as its efficient and cost-effective operation.

4.   A record-keeping system is a manual or automated information system in which records are captured and organized to facilitate their access and use, disposal and preservation.

Departmental Records Manager [paras. 210-219 of RMM]

5.   To assist the head of a bureau or department to establish and implement a proper departmental records management programme, a Departmental Records Manager, who is normally expected to be the Departmental Secretary or an officer holding equivalent position, should be appointed.

6.   He/She should oversee the departmental records management programme according to established government policies and procedures, encourage the cooperation of personnel in daily handling and use of records across the organization, and coordinate with GRS and other bureaux and departments on records management matters.

Records creation [paras. 300-318 of RMM]

7.   Records are created and captured to meet policy, operational, legal and financial purposes. Bureaux and departments should identify their business functions and assess their information needs so as to create and capture adequate but not excessive records.

8.   The captured records should be complete: a record contains not only the content but also the structure (e.g. the structure of an e-mail record covers its header, body, attachments and corresponding reply) and contextual information (e.g. the name of the organization and the person who prepared and transmitted the record, the date and/or time it was received) necessary to document an official activity or transaction. It should be possible to understand a record in the context of the organizational processes that produced it and of other linked records.

Records classification [paras. 400-449 of RMM]

9.   To facilitate the identification and retrieval of records, records should be systematically organized according to a records classification or

filing scheme, which is a plan for logical arrangement of records according to the subject (e.g. procurement of cleansing service) or functions/activities (e.g. human resource management, financial management) for which they were created. GRS has developed a subject filing scheme for common administrative records[1] for adoption by bureaux and departments (see **Records Management Publication No. 3** for details). For programme records[2] which are unique to each bureau or department, the latter should make reference to the procedures set out in **Publication No. 3** to develop its own filing scheme.

10. According to Security Regulations, records have to be classified according to their level of sensitivity. Different protection measures have to be adopted to handle records of different security classifications.

Records retrieval and access [paras. 450-482 of RMM]

11. Records should be accessed and used by authorized users taking into account their information need and security classification of the records.

Records storage [paras. 500-523 of RMM]

12. Records should be stored in such a manner so as to facilitate user access and protected from unauthorized access, use, disclosure, removal, deterioration, loss or destruction. They should be stored in a secure environment protected from dirt, water, insects and rodents, smoke, chemical exhausts, and away from direct sunlight.

Records disposal [paras. 600-635 of RMM]

13. Records accumulate and grow in the course of business. If records are not properly and systematically disposed of, useful and unwanted records will mix together making records retrieval difficult and time-consuming and

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[1] Administrative records are those records created or received during the course of administrative activities that deal with finance, accommodation, procurement and supply, establishment, personnel and other general administrative activities. Records of this nature are common to all bureaux and departments.

[2] Programme records (operational or functional records) are records created or received by a bureau or department whilst carrying out the primary functions, activities or missions for which the agency was established. Records of this nature are unique to each bureau and department.

hence affect operational efficiency. Furthermore, as records continue to build up, more resources will have to be set aside to meet storage needs.

14.   In this regard, bureaux and departments should plan to dispose of their unwanted records in a systematic manner. To dispose of administrative records, bureaux and departments should adopt the set of general administrative records disposal schedules developed by GRS (see **Records Management Publication No. 4** for details). For programme records, bureaux and departments should develop records retention and disposal schedules which stipulate the length of time that records should be retained and the ways of disposal (e.g. destruction, intermediate storage at records centre and then destruction, microfilming and then destruction, permanent retention) having regard to the administrative, operational, fiscal and legal requirements and archival values of the records. Please refer to **Records Management Publication No. 1** on development of records retention and disposal schedules.

Records having archival value [paras. 636-639 of RMM]

15.   Some records may contain information having archival value which forms part of the memory of the community. GRS is committed to preserving such records and material of enduring value for the benefit of the people of Hong Kong. Bureaux and departments should transfer their records having archival value to GRS according to the respective disposal schedules. To avoid destruction of records having archival value, bureaux and departments should **not** dispose of their records without prior consent of GRS.

Managing inactive records [Records Management Publications Nos. 1 and 5]

16.   Inactive records with low retrieval rate (e.g. those not retrieved in the last two years or only referred to at a frequency of not higher than three references per linear metre per month) are recommended to be stored off-site (e.g. in records centres operated by GRS) before final disposal to minimize storage cost. Bureaux and departments may also consider seeking the assistance of GRS to microfilm inactive records which have to be retained for not less than seven years to save storage space. Records centres providing low cost intermediate storage of inactive records are popular among bureaux and departments and are reaching their full capacity. Records for transfer to the records centres should be covered by updated disposal schedules. To maximize

the utilization of records centres, bureaux and departments should arrange timely disposal of the records stored therein in accordance with the relevant disposal schedules.

Vital records protection [paras. 700-730 of RMM]

17.　　　Vital records are those records containing information essential to the continued and effective operation of an organization during and after an emergency or disaster.　Bureaux and departments should identify and protect (e.g. through duplication and/or off-site storage) their vital records to improve their ability in managing crisis situations, ensure uninterrupted operation of major business functions during and after an emergency or a disaster, mitigate loss and damage, and protect the legal and financial rights and the interests of the clients they serve.

Managing records for administrative changes [paras. 800-838 of RMM]

18.　　　Bureaux and departments may need to transfer the custody or ownership of their records due to administrative changes (e.g. establishment, transfer, deletion or outsourcing of functions).　The bureaux and departments concerned should make preparation for such transfer (e.g. disposal of unwanted records, updating the filing scheme, and compilation of a list of records to be transferred).　Prior concurrence of GRS should be obtained for any transfer of records outside the Government.

Monitoring records management [paras. 900-917 of RMM]

19.　　　Bureaux and departments should monitor and review their records management function, including the operation of the record-keeping system and implementation of good records management practices regularly every five years or more often.

Source

20.　　　The RMM is available at CCGO website: http://grs.host.ccgo.hksarg./

**Records Management Publications
to be used in conjunction with the Records Management Manual**

Publication No. 1 – A Practical Guide to Records Scheduling and Disposal

1.   This publication provides a detailed procedural guide on the drawing up of retention and disposal schedules and explains the operation and services of the records centres operated by the Government Records Service (GRS).

Publication No. 2 – Managing Active Records: File Management

2.   This publication details the principles, standards and procedures in the management of active records kept in a paper-based record-keeping system. Major topics include the roles of registries and records officers, records grouping, file coding, handling of incoming and outgoing correspondence, file movement control, making up and closing of files.

Publication No. 3 – Subject Filing

3.   This publication establishes a comprehensive classification scheme for administrative records, which are grouped into six schedules viz. Administration, Accommodation and Facilities, Equipment and Supplies, Finance, Personnel as well as Information Systems and Services. It also provides guidelines on the development of a classification scheme for programme records.

Publication No. 4 – General Administrative Records Disposal Schedules

4.   As a sequel to Publication No. 3 and using the same classification scheme of administrative records, this publication sets out retention and disposal schedules of administrative records for adoption by bureaux and departments.

Publication No. 5 – The Microfilming User Manual

5.   This publication provides guidelines, standards and procedures for microfilming government records and the retrieval and maintenance of microfilm, as well as information on the service of the Government Microfilming Centre of GRS.

Publication No. 6 – Manual on Vital Records Protection

6.   This publication identifies common hazards to records, explains the importance of vital records protection, provides guidelines on selection of appropriate protection methods, and enumerates the steps in establishing a vital records protection programme.

Publication No. 7 – Checklist for Proper Records Management Practices

7.   Structured in a simple self-assessment format, this publication aims to provide a useful tool for planning, conducting and evaluating records management activities.

Publication No. 8 – 中文檔案管理指引

8.   This publication provides a practical guide on the proper handling and filing of Chinese documents in a bilingual environment. Major topics include the convention of writing Chinese documents, their formats and recording of Chinese documents onto minute sheets.

Guideline on the Management of Electronic Mail

9.   This publication provides guidance and instructions to help bureaux and departments identify and manage e-mail records so that sufficient and accurate evidence of official business will be retained. It also standardizes the "print-and-file" practice to ensure the appropriate capturing of e-mail records in the paper-based record-keeping environment.

Handbook on Records Management

10.   The handbook aims to provide Departmental Records Managers and their assistants with a total records management concept, together with the principles and good practices for improving the quality and cost-effectiveness of records management systems.

Source

11.   Full details on the publications are available at CCGO website: http://grs.host.ccgo.hksarg/.

Records Management Services provided by GRS

Service	Responsible Officer	Tel No.
Records Management Advice & Training	CEO (Records Management and Administration)	2195 7818
	SEO (Records Management)	2195 7789
Records Disposal and Records Centres	SEO (Records Management)	2460 3760
Records Appraisal and Transfer	Archivist (Public Records)	2195 7782
Government Microfilming Centre	Curator (Preservation Service)	2195 7808
Electronic Records Management	CEO (Record Systems Development)	2195 7790