

How do I use a Disposal Schedule?

SUMMARY

How do I use a Disposal Schedule? is the third part of an FAQ series on disposal. It explains:

- what sentencing is
- how to interpret disposal triggers
- general principles for sentencing
- how to sentence records.

WHAT IS SENTENCING?

Sentencing is using a Disposal Schedule and applying its actions to records. The schedule provides a 'sentence' - the minimum period you need to keep the record. Applying an action usually means:

- destroying temporary records or
- transferring permanent records to us.

Sentencing may occur on or after the creation of a record. It can be manual or automatic.

Sentencing on creation

Many records are sentenced on creation. This means identifying the retention and disposal action as part of classifying and titling records.

For example: You have implemented a Disposal Schedule in your electronic document and records management system (EDRMS). When you save a record into a file, the class, retention and trigger date are applied automatically to the record.

Sentencing after creation

Not all records are sentenced on creation. Sometimes it is not possible to identify a trigger at the time of creation. For example, client health records have a trigger of 10 or 15 years after last contact.

Do I ever have to resentence records?

When you have sentenced records – but not yet disposed of them – and the schedule is then superseded:

- you do not normally need to resentence records under the new schedule. But you must be clear which schedule (or version) you have sentenced under.

Please contact us for advice if the status of permanent records has changed.

Once a new schedule has been authorised, use it for any sentencing done from then on.

In other cases, you may sometimes need to resentence records. For example, you may need to resentence:

- legal records if they have been used in judicial proceedings
- personnel records if an employee becomes a senior executive.

HOW DO I INTERPRET DISPOSAL TRIGGERS?

Disposal Schedules set out a minimum retention period for records and a disposal trigger. The trigger is an event from which you calculate the disposal date.

| | | |
|--------------|---|---|
| 14.01 | Short-term Records of Food Service Administration | TEMPORARY |
| | Records of short-term value documenting the food service administration function. | Destroy 3 months after action completed |

Disposal Schedule for functional records of health administration (DA2525), Version 2.0.

Common disposal triggers include:

After action completed

This is the last record added to the file and the file is closed. It is not the last time the file was accessed. Mostly you can use the 'date last modified' as the date of last action. For example, the extract above uses 'Destroy 3 months after action completed'.

After expiry or termination

Used for contracts, agreements, leases, licences etc. For example, 'Destroy 7 years after completion or termination of contract'.

After superseded

Policies, procedures, training materials, etc. that have been replaced. For example, 'Destroy 5 years after training course materials are superseded'.

After date of birth

Used for clients, employees, patients or children in care. For example, 'Destroy 110 years after date of birth'.

When reference ceases

Used for short-term value records. Discussions with relevant business units will help set the retention period.

Compound triggers

Compound triggers have two potential events in the disposal trigger. For example, 'Destroy 7 years after action completed, or patient is 25 years of age, whichever is later'.

Major/minor and significant/not significant

Classes may be divided into 'major' or 'minor', 'significant' or 'not significant'. They will have different triggers and retentions, generally short-term ('minor') and long-term or permanent ('major'). Generally, 'major' or 'significant' events or matters:

- affect the State, whole-of-government or an entire organisation
- are of strategic (not operational) importance
- are controversial matters, often with intense public or media interest.

If there is no description of each category, or if you are unsure, contact us for advice.

CAN YOU EXPLAIN THE GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR SENTENCING?

Sentence on creation

Sentencing records at creation is more efficient than sentencing after creation.

Sentence inactive physical records before putting them in storage

Doing this is good practice. It means you store only required records, which reduces storage costs. Add schedule reference and destruction dates to boxes and EDRMS. This will make it easier to run reports and dispose of records later.

Use the longest retention period

If more than one disposal schedule or class could apply, keep records for the longest period.

Keep multi-part files for the same retention period

Some files have more than one part. This includes:

- multi-part files of the same format and
- hybrid (digital and paper) files.

Hardcopy property files are an example of multi-part files. These files were often split into parts for easier handling when they got too big.

Client health files are an example of hybrid files. Longstanding clients have files that started in paper, and more recent digital files.

Keep all parts of the file for the same retention period.

Sentence at the file level and don't cull individual records

Sentence at the file level, not the individual record level. This reduces the risk of losing contextual information. It is also more efficient.

Spot-check the file contents to ensure they are as described.

Culling individual records from files is not efficient and compromises file integrity. But sometimes you need to use common sense:

- Short-term temporary records are often mistakenly filed in permanent files if they are on the same topic. You may cull these records from the file.
- Some physical 'subject' files, like property files, contain large numbers of records reflecting many activities with varying retention periods. Accepted practice was to routinely review and cull short-term records from these files. It is more common now to identify the record with the longest retention and retain the entire file for that period. Either approach is acceptable.

Retaining temporary records for longer periods

Retention periods in Disposal Schedules are minimum periods. You may choose to keep temporary records longer if you have a business need for them. If you do, consider the risk of keeping records longer than legally required. This is particularly important if they contain personal, confidential or sensitive information.

Make records

Document your decisions, recommendations and approvals. Record destruction of temporary records in your *Register of Records Destroyed*.

HOW DO I SENTENCE RECORDS?

Adapt the steps below to suit your organisational practices. Steps for a regular disposal programme in your EDRMS will differ to a project to sentence paper records in storage.

Steps for sentencing records:

1. Know your business

- Get familiar with your organisation's role, functions and activities, now and when the records were made. Make sure this includes records inherited through government administrative change.
- Identify which business units to contact for more information about the records.

2. Identify records due for disposal

- Run a report in your EDRMS for digital records (and records in other formats if they are described). Use other control records to identify physical records.

3. Identify the Disposal Schedule

- In your EDRMS your disposal schedule will already be set up. For physical records, check our website for current authorised schedules.
- Identify the relevant schedule/s – records may be covered by more than one schedule.
- Ensure you apply the current version of the schedule/s.
- Review the report against the schedule/s.

4. Identify the functions, activities and class

- Match the records to functions, activities and class in the schedule.

5. Confirm the retention period and disposal trigger have passed

- Calculate the disposal date using the trigger.
- If the disposal trigger has not yet taken place, set a future review date.

6. Confirm records are not needed for legal or business purposes

- Ensure the records are not covered by a disposal freeze or needed for legal matters. Check the introduction to the Disposal Schedule for full details. Check our website for current disposal freezes.
- Liaise with relevant business units to confirm they have no further need for the records.

7. Recommend the disposal and gain approval

- Recommend the disposal (or continued retention) of records.
- Get organisational approval to dispose of records
- Final review by Records Manager before disposal starts.

8. Apply and document the disposal action

- Complete the disposal actions – either destruction or transfer to the Tasmanian Archives.
- Destroy temporary records using the methods in our forthcoming *Destruction Methods Technical Standard*.
- Record destruction of records in your *Register of Records Destroyed*.
- Contact our Office to discuss transferring permanent records to the Archives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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MORE INFORMATION

Documents in this series are:

- *What is disposal?*
- *What is a Disposal Schedule?*
- *How do I use a Disposal Schedule?*
- *How do I get a Disposal Schedule?*
- *Disposal Schedule conventions.*

CONTACT US

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How do I use a Disposal Schedule? is part of the *Tasmanian Government Information Management Framework*. It supports the *Information and records management standard*. This is a living document and we will make minor changes as needed. If you notice anything that needs updating, please let us know.



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Document Development History

| Version | Date | Comments |
|---------|------------|-----------------|
| 1 | 12/08/2025 | Initial release |