

# Myths in Records Management

## Myth #1: Only some records are really public records, right?

**Answer:** It's safest to assume that all records an agency or public employee creates and uses are in fact, "public records." Technology has enabled agencies to create massive amounts records and information, and trying to determine between what is or is not a public record can end up being a never ending debate.

It is safer and saves time and energy to operate under the assumption that everything created or used in conducting the business of government is a public record – regardless of it being a piece of paper, an email, social media, created on a device, or stored in SharePoint.

Format doesn't matter, location doesn't matter, what technology you're using doesn't matter. Even if it's a copy of a public record does not negate the fact you are dealing with public records.

You can read for yourself the definitions of a public record that exist in statute, they pretty much say the same thing: A writing, regardless of physical form or characteristics, created by and used by any agency of the state of Washington in connection with the transaction of public business.

- 40.14.010 RCW Preservation and Destruction of Public Records (1957)
- 42.56.010 RCW Public Records Act (1972)

Join us next time as we continue myth-busting where records management is concerned!

# Myths in Records Management

## Myth #2: It's easier just to keep everything, and storage is cheap.

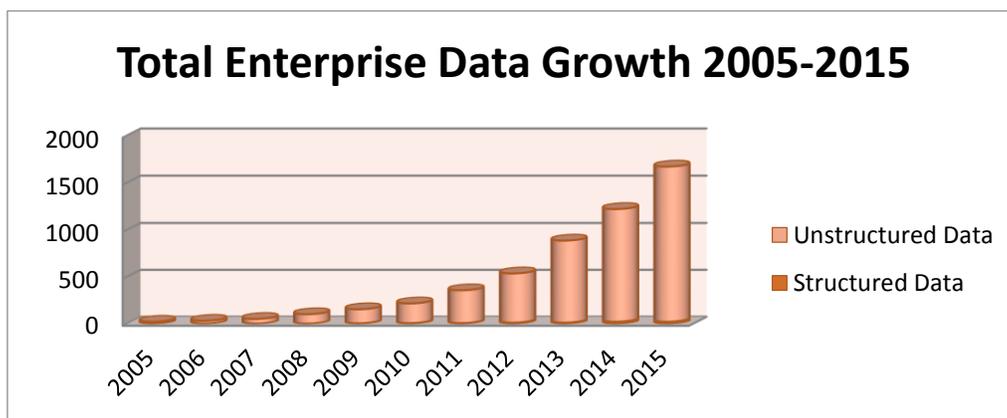
**Answer: Not only no, but HECK NO!** Even in the days of paper an agency was not required to keep every scrap, note, doodle, Post-It note, draft, or every incarnation of a particular report or document. It didn't make sense back then to keep everything, and it doesn't make any more sense now. *In fact keeping everything compounds the problem, not making anything easier or cheaper.*

One of the best benefits of records management is getting rid of records – either by destruction or transfer to the Archives (in records speak it is referred to as “disposition”). It's a verb, which means to do something!) Systematic and defensible disposition **decreases** costs when it comes to storage space, equipment and staff as well as lowering costs of production and defense for any lawsuits.

The costs for storage and maintenance **increase** substantially with each extra gigabyte of unneeded and unnecessary information lingering on your servers and in your databases. A smart business develops strategies and plans for the care of their informational assets. We don't hang onto surplus equipment, why hang onto surplus records?

Keeping things “just in case” because something *might happen* (just in case we get a records request) or you *think* you may want to refer to it distant future (just in case someone may want to see it in the next millennium, I'm going to keep that first draft) or it's “old” (just in case it might be valuable one day) are not valid reasons or grounds to keep hanging onto records. If the relevant business needs and legal requirements and obligations have come and gone and the agency has the authority to get rid of it, then don't keep it! Apply defensible disposition!

Another real benefit to records management is that if you are following best practices, you are covered “just in case” anyway.



IDC estimates the volume of digital data will grow 40% to 50% per year. By 2020, IDC predicts the number will have reached 40,000 EB, or 40 Zettabytes (ZB). The world's information is doubling every two years. By 2020 the world will generate 50 times the amount of information and 75 times the number of information containers.

**There is a misconception that storage is cheap.** Initial outlay, yes, it is cheap. Thumb drives are available that will hold 9 gigabytes for around 10 bucks. But there are other less obvious costs that are associated with use of technology since digital "storage" involves more than lingering on a server or sticking it on a 10 gig flash drive.

**Hardware:** You need the equipment to run the software, and you will likely have to replace that equipment regularly due to obsolescence or failure. Servers take up space, and require cooling, climate controls, and energy to run.

**Software:** You have to keep/maintain/upgrade the software so you can read, access, and retrieve it, and software fails or becomes obsolescent too.

**Staff:** Humans still are needed to maintain all of the above and respond as below.

**Legal:** There is an increased risk to keeping everything when it comes to disclosure and discovery. If you keep a record, you need to be able to locate and search it to respond to litigation or public records requests. This is expensive both in terms of staff time and technology required to search hundreds of locations and thousands of files/emails where relevant records might reasonably exist. Failure to do so can lead to expensive consequences.

If you are storing 9 gigabytes of emails, those 9 gigabytes are subject to searching and production, redactions, attorney review, not to mention showing up in the headlines. You may have the most robust key word feature/search app ever, it still takes time, money and humans to facilitate appropriate production going through those gigabytes. That's not easy or cheap.

Bottom line, we are spending **more** on storing our data than ever before and paying **more** for public disclosure requests lawsuits.

Join us again next time as we continue myth-busting old conceptions of what it means to manage your records!

ARCHIE ARCHIVE SAYS  
RECORDS MANAGEMENT  
IS EVERYONE'S JOB

