

## Paper storage standards

### Introduction

Threats to paper records include theft, pests, fire, and flood. Additionally, fluctuating temperatures and levels of humidity can encourage mould growth on paper. The location of records can impact on their accessibility and their long term preservation. Records must be stored somewhere easily accessible to any member of staff who may need them. They must also be stored somewhere which ensures they last for as long as they are required, which may be many years. In addition to these general principals, you may need to adopt more stringent measures for more valuable documents, perhaps items you have identified as legacy or vital records. There are various ways of protecting your records, ranging from extremely expensive options that offer a high degree of protection (for example, fire-proofing a room), to simpler options offering a lesser degree of protection (for example, storing vital records in cardboard boxes). Deciding which approach to adopt is about balancing what is practical, given your location, environment and resources, with what is desirable, given the nature of the records.

### General advice

Records storage areas should be:

**Secure** – a lockable filing cabinet, cupboard, or room.

**Clean** – including being free from signs of infestation. Arrange regular cleaning.

**Organised** – know where to find your records. However, be aware that it is not always appropriate to advertise the exact contents of storage boxes for security reasons. You may want to label them with a number that corresponds to a list held elsewhere. Have any necessary equipment – e.g. ladders, stools, tables, boxes – to hand.

**Dry** – beware of storing records near water or pipes. Raise bottom shelves at least 5cm of the floor. Boxes provide some protection against water damage. Do not store anything on the tops of shelving units; the top shelf will provide some protection against water from above. Do not store records in the top floor of a building with a leaky roof, or in a damp basement.

**Fire safe** – don't store records near inflammable materials or rooms containing inflammable materials. Keeping papers tightly packed in boxes or cabinets restricts airflow in the event of a fire, and can help preserve records.

**Accessible** – keep your most frequently used records in the most accessible location.

**Safe** – observe health and safety practices. Consider how much space you need to get around the room, and to use and store equipment – such as ladders. Be aware of manual handling procedures; don't overfill boxes or filing cabinets, don't keep heavy boxes on high shelves.

### **Additional precautions**

**Scan and save electronically.** A simple and fairly effective measure, especially if the records are then stored on the University computer network. If you have a considerable quantity of records, the costs involved in converting them to an electronic form may be substantial, but the benefits of storing them electronically may outweigh this drawback. However, be aware that the legal admissibility of electronic records (that is, whether they would be accepted as a piece of evidence by a court of law) is not straightforward. The records management guidance document on Electronic Records and Legal Admissibility, available to download from the Record Management section's website can give guidance on this.

**Security risks.** Are your records particularly sensitive – might they attract theft or bomb threats? (For example, records of animal experimentation may be considered to be sensitive.) Do you need more than your section's standard security measures?

**Environmental monitoring.** Data loggers are devices which can take regular measurements of the temperature and relative humidity of a storage area. This information can assist you with ensuring that records are kept in optimal conditions, and in making adjustments to the environmental conditions in which records are kept.

**Duplication and dispersal.** Keeping papers in at least two locations within the University affords a fairly low level of protection, but is relatively cheap. It may be considered adequate especially if there is more than one building across which copies can be spread.

**Remote storage.** Copies may be stored with a commercial storage company specialising in secure storage; in a bank vault (if the quantity of records is not large); or in an offsite facility that has the necessary security features such as fireproofing.

**Boxes.** Stout cardboard boxes will offer some short-term protection from fire and water. Paper tightly packed in cardboard boxes is less likely to burn, and cardboard boxes offer a reasonable protection from water. In addition, boxes are far easier to move speedily in case of emergency than filing cabinets.

**Fireproof rooms.** These are expensive, but very effective if set up properly with fire resistance for a minimum of four hours, a fire detection system, temperature and humidity

control, dust-free conditions, and a secure locking device or some controlled access systems.

### About this guidance

Version control	Author/editor	Date	Edits made
4	Claire Friend	February 2018	Removed repetition. Reformatted for accessibility.
3	Jenny Middleton	September 2005	

If you require the guidance in an alternative format, please contact the Records Manager at [Rob.Don@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Rob.Don@ed.ac.uk)