San Francisco Department of Public Health

*Policy & Procedure Detail**

Policy & Procedure Title: COM.1 Records Management Policy	
Category: Compliance	
Effective Date: 2003	**Last Reissue/Revision Date:** 3/2/2026
DPH Unit of Origin: Office of Compliance and Privacy Affairs	
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Distribution: DPH-wide ☒	**If not DPH-wide, other distribution:**

All sections in table required.

I. **Purpose and Scope:**

A. **Purpose:** The San Francisco Department of Public Health (DPH) Records Management Policy is adopted pursuant to Chapter 8 of the San Francisco Administrative Code, which requires each department head to maintain records and create a records retention and destruction schedule.

B. **Scope:** This policy and procedure covers all records and documents, regardless of physical form or characteristics, which have been made or received by the DPH in connection with the transaction of public business.

II. **Policy:**

A. **Retention:** DPH shall retain records for the period of their immediate or current use, unless longer retention is necessary for historical reference, or to comply with contractual or legal requirements, or for other purposes as set forth below. For record retention and destruction purposes, the term "record" is defined as set forth in Section 8.1 of the San Francisco Administrative Code. Documents and other materials that do not constitute "records" under that section, including those described below in Category 4, may be destroyed when no longer needed, unless otherwise specified. The Record Retention and Destruction Schedule is maintained on the City and County of San Francisco's Index of Records.

III. **Definitions:**

A. **Records:** Include paper, book, photograph, film, sound recording, map, drawing or other documents, or any copy, made or received by the department in connection with the transaction of public business.

IV. **Procedures:**

A. DPH's records shall be classified for purposes of retention and destruction as follows:

1. **Category 1: Permanent Retention:** Records that are permanent or essential shall be retained and preserved indefinitely.

i. **Permanent records:** Permanent records are required by law to be retained permanently. The paper records are ineligible for destruction unless they are microfilmed or placed on an optical imaging storage system. (Admin. Code Section 8.4.) Duplicate copies of permanent records may be destroyed whenever they are no longer necessary for the efficient operations of DPH. Examples of permanent records include death and birth certificates, records reflecting formal Health Commission decisions, and records of historical interest such as San Francisco Department of Public Health and hospital annual reports.

ii. **Essential records:** Essential records are records that are essential to the continuity of government and the protection of rights and interests of individuals in the event of a major disaster. They are to be preserved against possible destruction by fire, earthquake, flood, enemy attack or other causes (Admin. Code Section 8.9.). Examples of essential records include patient clinical records, Health Commission Resolutions, and administrative records.

2. **Category 2: Current Records:** Current records are records which for convenience, ready reference or other reasons are retained in the office space and equipment of the Department. Current records shall be retained as follows:

i. **When the retention period is legally mandated:** Where federal, state, or local law prescribes a definite period of time for retaining certain records, DPH will retain the records for the period specified by law. Example of records required to be maintained for a specific period are client/patient records, Health Commission reports, and budget documents.

ii. **When the retention period is not legally mandated:** Where no specific retention period is specified by law, DPH has specified the retention period for those records that the department is required to retain. Records shall be retained for a minimum of two years, although such records may be treated as "storage records" and placed in storage at any time during the applicable retention period. Examples of current records include meeting minutes, organization charts, and legislative analyses.

3. **Category 3: Storage Records:** Storage records are records that are retained offsite. Storage records are subject to the same retention requirements as current records (Category 2).

4. **Category 4: No Retention Required:** Documents and other materials that are not "records" as defined by Admin. Code Section 8.1 need not be retained unless otherwise specified by local law (e.g., department head calendars). Documents and other materials (including originals and duplicates) that are not otherwise required to be retained, are not necessary to the functioning or continuity of the Department and which have no legal significance may be destroyed when no longer needed. Examples include materials and documents generated for the convenience of the person generating them, drafts for documents which have been superseded by subsequent versions (other than some contracts), or rendered moot by departmental action, and duplicate copies of records that are no longer needed. Specific examples include calendars (other than the Public Health Director's calendar), telephone message slips, miscellaneous correspondence not requiring follow-up or departmental action, notepads, emails that do not contain information required to be retained under this policy, and chronological files.

B. **Storage of Records:** Records may be stored in DPH's office space or equipment if the records are inactive or are maintained in the office for convenience or ready reference. Examples of active files appropriately maintained in DPH's office space or equipment include active chronological files, personnel files, and calendars. Inactive records, for which use or reference has diminished sufficiently to permit removal from DPH's office space or equipment, may be sent to the City's off-site storage facility or maintained in DPH's storage facility.

C. **Historical Records:** Historical records are records which are no longer of use to DPH but which because of their age or research value may be of historical interest or significance may not be destroyed except in accordance with the procedures set forth in Administrative Code Section 8.7.

D. **Pending Claims and Litigation:** The retention periods set forth in the DPH's record retention schedule shall not apply to materials that are otherwise eligible for destruction, but which may be relevant to a pending claim of litigation against the City. Once DPH becomes aware of the existence of a claim against the department, DPH must retain all documents and other materials related to the claim until such time as the claim or subsequent litigation has been resolved and records have been released by the City Attorney. Where a department has reason to believe that one or more other departments also have records relating to the claim or litigation, these departments should also be notified of the need to retain such records.

V. References/Attachments

A. **San Francisco Administrative Code, Sections 8.1, 8.4, 8.7, 8.9** "Documents, Records and Publications" (attached).

B. **SF Index of Records:** The Index of Records is a citywide, searchable database for guidance regarding the maintenance of all records, with instructions regarding retention and destruction. It houses the entirety of DPH's Records Retention and Destruction Schedule, including DPH's various sections, Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital, Laguna Honda Hospital.

Last Reviewed/Revised: 2003; 3/2/2018; 2/5/2025; 3/2/2026

SEC. 8.1. "RECORDS" DEFINED.

"Records," as used in this Chapter, shall mean such paper, book, photograph, film, sound recording, map, drawing or other document, or any copy thereof, as has been made or received by the department in connection with the transaction of public business and may have been retained by the department as evidence of the department's activities, for the information contained therein, or to protect the legal or financial rights of the City and County or of persons directly affected by the activities of the City and County.

(Ord. No. 7070(1939), Sec. 1)

SEC. 8.4. RECORDS CLASSIFICATIONS.

"Records," as defined in Section 8.1 of this Code, shall for the purposes of this Chapter be divided into three classifications: current records, storage records and permanent records.

"Current records" are records which for convenience, ready reference or other reason are retained in office space and equipment of the department involved.

"Storage records" are records which need not be retained in office space and equipment of the department involved, but which must be, or should be, prudently preserved for a time or permanently in the facilities of a records center, as specified in the following section.

"Permanent records" are records required by law to be permanently retained. Unless otherwise required by law or regulation, permanent records shall be stored by microfilming the paper records or placing them on an optical imaging storage system, placing the original film or tape in a State-approved storage vault and delivering a copy to the department. The paper records may then be destroyed.

(Ord. No. 7070(1939), Sec. 3; amended by Ord. 530-88, App. 12/16/88)

SEC. 8.7. PREREQUISITES TO DESTRUCTION OF RECORDS; SALE IN LIEU OF DESTRUCTION.

(a) Before any book, document, photograph, map, architectural drawing, record, bond certificate, or other material of historical significance is destroyed, the following procedure shall be observed:

(1) It shall be offered by the officer concerned, i.e., the Mayor or the Mayor's designee, or by boards or commissions for departments under their respective jurisdiction, to the San Francisco History Room of the San Francisco Public Library;

(2) Such items not accepted by the San Francisco Public Library may be sold by the office of the Mayor, together with copies thereof;

(3) In the event the Public Library declines to accept said historical material, or after sale thereof by the Mayor, any remaining such historical material may be offered to an historical society.

(b) After all the steps outlined in Paragraph (a) above have been observed, any remaining historical records, as well as any large volume of records without historic significance which are to be destroyed, shall be offered for sale by the City Purchaser. The sales contract must provide that the buyer guarantees to the satisfaction of the City Purchaser that the records will be shredded beyond identification or otherwise destroyed within a short period of time after taking delivery.

(Amended by Ord. 306-72, App. 10/19/72; Ord. 70-95, App. 3/24/95; Ord. 278-96, App. 7/3/96; Ord. 260-99, File No. 991365, App. 10/15/99)

SEC. 8.9. PRESERVATION OF ESSENTIAL RECORDS.

It is hereby declared that the public interest demands that various City and County records which would be essential to the continuity of government and the protection of rights and interests of individuals in event of a major disaster (hereinafter referred to as "essential records") be preserved against possible destruction by fire, earthquake, flood, enemy attack or other cause. It shall be the duty of each department head to develop a program for the selection and preservation of the essential records of the department and to arrange for safe storage of those essential records and duplicates thereof in the same manner as is provided for the storage of permanent records under Section 8.4 of this Code.

(Amended by Ord. 126-62, App. 5/24/62; Ord. 530-88, App. 12/16/88)