

Department of Veterans Affairs
Washington, DC 20420

VA HANDBOOK 6300.2
Transmittal Sheet
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MANAGEMENT OF THE VITAL RECORDS PROGRAM

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** This handbook establishes Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) procedures for managing the Vital Records Program and implements the policies contained in VA Directive 6300, Records and Information Management.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This handbook provides procedures for the management of Category B, Legal and Financial Rights Vital Records.
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Information Management Service (045A4), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Information Resources Management, is responsible for the material contained in this handbook.
- 4. RELATED DIRECTIVES:** VA Directive 6300, Records and Information Management.
- 5. RESCISSION:** None

CERTIFIED BY:

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MANAGEMENT OF THE VITAL RECORDS PROGRAM

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MANAGEMENT OF THE VITAL RECORDS PROGRAM

1. PURPOSE. This handbook contains mandatory procedures for managing the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) vital records program. This handbook includes guidance for the selection and protection of Legal and Financial Rights Vital Records and implements the provisions of 36 CFR 1236. The provisions of this handbook are applicable VA-wide.

2. GENERAL

a. The vital records program is essential to provide VA officials with the information necessary to conduct business under other than normal operating conditions and to resume normal business afterward.

b. Records essential for maintaining the continuity of VA activities during and following a national security emergency or a natural disaster comprise VA's vital records. These records are categorized as either Emergency Operating Records or Legal and Financial Rights Records as described below:

(1) **Emergency Operating Records:**

(a) These records are vital to the continuity of essential functions of the Federal Government for the duration of a national security emergency, such as national defense; the mobilization and protection of material and human resources; and the maintenance of public health, safety, and order. They are commonly referred to as "*Category A*" *Emergency Operating Records*. In VA, such records include general management records, lists of key personnel, and assigned mission records.

(b) Emergency operating records are required by top and intermediate officials at emergency relocation sites to accomplish VA's essential functions. These records should be in paper form to avoid reliance on special equipment. If it is necessary to use a nonpaper medium, such as an electronic record, both the equipment required to read or recover the record and its power source must be dependable under emergency conditions. Refer to VA Handbook 0320.1, Emergency Preparedness Planning Procedures and Operational Requirements.

(2) **Legal and Financial Rights Records:**

(a) These records are essential to protecting the legal and financial rights of individual citizens and the Government and are required to carry out VA's essential functions after a period of immediate emergency in order to protect the legal rights of veterans, their dependents and beneficiaries, VA employees, and the Department. They are commonly referred to as "*Category B Legal and Financial Rights Records*." Legal and financial rights records include payroll and leave records, insurance records, accounts receivable records, and valuable research findings. They also contain

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information on such matters as proof of ownership, financial interests, and legal proceedings and decisions.

(b) These records require protection, but are not needed immediately following an emergency. Storage points do not have to be at or in the vicinity of emergency relocation sites, and the records do not have to be solely in paper form. VA maintains Category B vital records at the VA Records Center & Vault (RC&V) located in Neosho, Missouri.

3. RECORDS OFFICERS RESPONSIBILITIES: In addition to the responsibilities contained in VA Handbook 6300.1, Records Management Procedures, Chapter 3, the following specific responsibilities will be carried out by administration and staff office Records Officers in connection with the vital records program:

a. Coordinate all vital record activities within his/her organization and ensure that all proposals to develop and/or change vital records activities conform to the provisions of this handbook.

b. Prepare, maintain, and publish a vital records schedule of Category B, legal and financial rights records, and ensure schedules are kept up-to-date.

c. Provide direction and guidance or otherwise ensure that Category B Vital Records listed in the Vital Records Schedule are forwarded to the RC&V in accordance with the shipment schedule.

d. Provide VA Records Officer with current schedules and/or updates thereto.

4. SELECTION AND MAINTENANCE OF CATEGORY B VITAL RECORDS.

The selection and protection of vital records are guided by the objectives and requirements of Executive Order 12656; 36 CFR chapter XII, part 1236; and the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Vital Records and Records Disaster Mitigation and Recovery Instructional Guide. The following guidelines are for the selection and maintenance of Category B Legal and Financial Rights Vital Records:

a. Vital records classified as Category B are usually maintained as duplicate copies of the original records and are stored at the RC&V. Category B Vital Record copies may be:

(1) Duplicates of records at other locations that are created for an alternate program purpose at the time the original record is created, rather than specifically as vital records. They are already maintained on file away from the original records at separate locations in VA, in other agencies, or in private facilities to which Department officials have access in time of emergency. Copies of these records are not stored at emergency relocation sites.

(2) Duplicates that are created specifically for storage at a designated vital records location such as RC&V. These copies are prepared simultaneously with the original and

other records in regular day-to-day operations and are transferred to an alternate location, such as the RC&V, for storage in accordance with the designated vital records schedule.

(3) Copies of existing records that are made either because no extra copies are available or because the nature of the record makes it difficult to create multiple copies at the time the original record is created. These copies are made by various methods depending on the quantity of records to be copied and the nature of the record.

(4) An original document or a “lone copy” having no backup at the originating facility. In this case the document must be identified as “lone copy” or “only copy” to assure that it is protected accordingly.

(5) If performing duplication, it generally is most economical to duplicate the original medium onto the same medium; that is, duplicate microfiche onto microfiche or magnetic tape onto magnetic tape. Appropriate equipment should be selected to ensure the continued preservation of copies until they are cycled.

b. Common forms of reproduction of vital records are as follows:

(1) **Microfilm.** Microfilm is an excellent method for copying vital records because the process is quick and eliminates many storage problems. The microfilming of vital records will be accomplished in accordance with standards outlined in the NARA Managing Micrographic Records Instructional Guide.

(2) **Electronic records.** Storage media for electronic vital records include magnetic tape reels, diskettes, cartridges, and direct access storage devices. If vital records and information are maintained in electronic form, a duplicate of the storage media and a duplicate of the related program and technical documentation required to use the records will be stored at the same location with the records. Because of the fragile nature of electronic information, care must be taken to ensure that the electronic storage media used for vital records are protected against loss of valuable information. Such protection should consist of periodic recall and inspection or replacement of storage media. The inspection of electronic records storage media will adhere to the requirements outlined in the NARA Managing Electronic Records Instructional Guide.

c. In certain instances, one VA facility may be designated to provide the service of preparing microfilm vital record copies for another facility. The servicing facility will be responsible for ensuring that the records are properly shipped to the RC&V.

5. CATEGORY B VITAL RECORDS SCHEDULES

a. All legal and financial rights vital records will be identified and listed in a vital records schedule.

b. The schedule will contain at a minimum the following information:

(1) Item Number. Each vital record will be identified with an item number which will be determined by the responsible administration or program office.

(2) Record Description. Brief description of the vital record to include the medium on which the records are recorded; i.e., paper, microfilm, etc.

(3) Office of Jurisdiction. Show the owner of the vital record.

(4) Shipment Schedule. The frequency with which the records are to be cycled (updated) to the RC&V; e.g., annually in February; Biweekly; etc. The frequency of cycling (updating) will be based on how current the records to protect rights must be to meet the information needs and responsibilities. Depending on those needs and upon the medium on which the vital record is maintained, cycling may occur daily, weekly, monthly, annually, or at longer intervals.

(5) Disposition at the RC&V. Indicate the final disposition of the vital record at the RC&V. For example: destroy upon receipt of succeeding year's film.

c. Administration and staff office Records Officers may direct their questions regarding development of vital records schedules to the OIRM Information Management Service (045A4). Field facilities should direct their questions to their respective administration or program office Records Officer.

6. SHIPMENT OF CATEGORY B VITAL RECORDS TO THE VA RECORDS CENTER & VAULT IN NEOSHO, MISSOURI: See VA Handbook 6300.8, Shipment of Records to The Department of Veterans Affairs Records Center and Vault in Neosho, Missouri, for specific procedures for shipping records to the RC&V.

DEFINITIONS

1. **Cycle** The periodic removal of obsolete copies of vital records and their replacement with copies of current vital records. This may occur daily, weekly, quarterly, annually or at other designated intervals.
2. **Emergency** A situation or an occurrence of a serious nature, developing suddenly and unexpectedly, and demanding immediate action. This is generally of short duration, for example, an interruption of normal agency operations for a week or less. It may involve electrical failure or minor flooding caused by broken pipes.
3. **Emergency Operating Vital Records (Category A)** The types of vital records essential to the continued functioning or reconstruction of an organization during and after an emergency. Included are emergency plans and directive(s), orders of succession, delegations of authority, staffing assignments, selected program records needed to continue the most critical agency operations, as well as related policy or procedural records that assist agency staff in conducting operations under emergency conditions and for resuming normal operations after an emergency.
4. **Legal and Financial Rights Vital Records (Category B)** The types of vital records essential to protect the legal and financial rights of the Government and of the individuals directly affected by its activities. Examples include accounts receivable records, social security records, payroll records, and insurance records. These records were formerly defined as “rights-and-interests” records. Records that have the properties of both emergency-operating and legal-and-financial rights records are treated as emergency-operating records.
5. **National Security Emergency** Any occurrence, including natural disaster, military attack, technological emergency, or other emergency that seriously degrades or threatens the national security of the United States, as defined in Executive Order 12656.
6. **Vital Records** Essential VA records that are needed to meet operational responsibilities under national security emergencies or other emergency or disaster conditions or to protect the legal and financial rights of the Government and those affected by Government activities.
7. **Vital Records Program** The policies, plans, and procedures developed and implemented and the resources needed to identify, use, and protect the essential records needed to meet operational responsibilities under national security emergencies or other emergency or disaster conditions or to protect the Government’s rights or those of its citizens.