Vital Records

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Background

- Vital records of an organization must be identified so they can be protected.
- Protection of vital records is a joint effort of records management and disaster planning.
Vital Records Program

- Identification of records consider “vital”
- Policies and procedures necessary to protect them
- Procedures to facilitate use of necessary records in an emergency
What makes a Record Vital?

- Information can’t be duplicated at any cost or cost of replacing would be prohibitive
- Major business impact if not immediately available
- Necessary to resume or continue operations
- Required to recreate legal or financial status
- Protects obligations to employees
- Protects rights of other stakeholders
What is Vital?

If a catastrophic event occurred, what information would be

**absolutely necessary**
to resume business on a limited basis

- Immediately (next few days)
- Near term
ANSI/ARMA 5-2003
Vital Records are….

- Records that are fundamental to the functioning of an organization.
- Contain information critical to the continued operation or survival of an organization during or immediately following a crisis.
- Necessary to continue operations without delay under abnormal conditions.
Vital Records

- Records that contain information necessary to recreate an organization's legal and financial status and to preserve the rights and obligations of stakeholders, including employees, customers, investors, and citizens.
Texas agencies…

- Vital records series are designated but are not made mandatory.
- The RMO in each agency is responsible for determining which records series of the agency are vital.
- Records series unique to the agency may be vital.
- Some records series designated as vital on the State schedule may not be vital for an organization, depending on the nature of its internal recordkeeping systems.
Other Organizations

- Business impact analysis
- Site survey
- Records risk assessment and analysis
  - Likely risks/probability
  - What is acceptable loss
  - Cost and methods of protection
  - Prioritization
Why does it matter?

- If a record IS essential to the resumption of operations
- AND is not available from other sources
- THUS is unavailable when it is needed…
- One disaster could be devastating
Disaster Recovery Plan

- Backups of computer network data should make restoration of electronic data possible
- Need for hot spot
Vital Records Identification

- Meet operational responsibilities under disaster conditions
- Protect the legal and financial rights of the entity and those affected by its activities
- Essential to the continuation, resumption or reconstruction of business
- Important to preserving the rights of the company, agency, its staff and other stakeholders
- Necessary to establish legal and fiscal responsibility, status and position
Vital Records Information

- Business reason information is vital
- Paper or Electronic format
- Location
  - Access information
  - Quantity
  - Backup location
  - Backup plan
Evaluation of Records

- Which records could keep operations from resuming?
- What would be the consequences if these records were unavailable?
- Which records could not be replaced at ANY cost?
- How soon would these records be needed?
Examples of Vital Records

- Emergency Operating Records
  - Disaster Recovery Plan
  - Orders of succession
  - Phone lists
  - Lists of vital records

- Legal and Financial Rights Records
  - Accounting records
  - Insurance Records
  - Contracts
Records Risk

- Paper
  - In 9-11, almost no paper survived
  - Paper less likely to be backed up than electronic documents

- Electronic
  - Network backed up
  - Backup offsite
  - Disaster recovery plan
Risk Assessment

- Risks – fire, water damage, flood, etc.
- Probable threats – tornado, hurricane, etc.
- Vulnerabilities – records stored in flood-prone area, old building, equipment downtime
Backup Methods for Paper Records

- **Natural dispersal**
  - a copy of the record is sent somewhere else as part of the normal business routine

- **Improvised dispersal**
  - duplicates of the record are made and sent to a protected environment on or off site on a regularly scheduled basis

- **Planned dispersal**
  - a distribution that is created specifically for protection purposes and not as a routine part of the business operation. This can include offsite storage, imaging a document or microfilming.
Backup Methods for Electronic Records

- **Electronic Vaulting**
  - Vital records are transferred to an alternate server or data warehouse

- **Data Replication**
  - Transactional replication (when changes are made)
  - Mirroring (synchronous)
  - Shadowing (asynchronous)
Vital Records Considerations

- Typically, only 3% to 7% of an organization's records would be classified as vital.
- Vital information is often confused with important information or historical/archival information.
- Vital records may be maintained on any kind of information media.
- Many vital records require "cycling" – the periodic removal of obsolete copies of vital records and their replacement with current copies of the vital records.
Vital Records List

- Inventory records and information
- Evaluate and classify
- Prioritize
  - Vital - essential for
    - emergency operations
    - business resumption
    - legal or audit protection
  - Important
  - Useful
Vital

– Highest protection priority
  ● Needed to protect legal, financial, or operational functions
  ● Could not be replaced by any means
  ● Grave business consequences if not available
  ● No amount of risk is acceptable
- Secondary protection priority
  - Also essential for asset protection
  - May be available from other sources
  - May not be needed immediately following a disaster

- Evaluation of risk
  - Would replacement cost exceed protection cost?
  - What efforts would be required?
  - How soon would information be needed?
  - How dire would consequences of not having it be?
Useful

– Lowest protection priority
  ● Loss would cause inconvenience
  ● Not essential to resumption of business
Vital Records Manual

- Vital Records List/Schedule
- Procedures to retrieve backups
- Disaster Recovery procedures
- Emergency contact list (key personnel and recovery contractors)
  - Physical and email address, all phone #’s
- Disaster Recovery firm contact
- Site and facility maps

Review annually!!
Storage of Vital Records Manual

- Copies maintained by holders of relevant positions
- Assignment/possession logged (w/dates)
- With collections of vital records (in a protected environment)
Be prepared!
Bibliography

- **ANSI /ARMA 5-2003**
  *Vital Records Programs: Identifying, Managing, & Recovering Business-Critical Records*
  - Author & Publisher: ARMA International

- **Vital Records Resources Guide**
  - Information Management Branch, Alberta Govt. Services, Edmonton