

In a Fox Cities Minute: Document Destruction

When to Dump Those Old Documents



With a New Year underway, it's a great time to push up the sleeves and go through the file cabinet, or for many, file closet. But when can you get rid of certain documents? Many think seven is the magic number; however, experts say that may not be true for all documents.

"Different document types can have very different rules in place as to when they can be shredded or discarded," says Eric Haas, president and owner of A.R.M.S (Automated Records Management Systems) in De Pere, WI. "It's extremely important that before you shred or discard anything, you consult both your legal and accounting staff to determine the length of time for that specific record. Then, based on your findings, a records retention and destruction plan is formulated."

Haas says a records retention and destruction plan should incorporate the following:

- **Document type and what laws can affect their "shelf life"** – Patent work, trademarks, building plans, etc., ... all have different storage lengths based on local or Federal regulations. In fact, there are even many federal laws now based upon the information with PCI compliance, FACTA, HIPA and Sarbanes-Oxley which need to be taken into account when deciding how long to hold onto that particular document.
- **A retention schedule** – Many have a misconception that it's better to be safe than sorry when it comes to holding onto documents; however, if they aren't discarded

precisely when it's time, federal law says that during an audit, they can go through all of your records on hand, regardless the age.

- **Destruction Plan of Action** – When the decision is made that certain documents can be discarded, it's critical to discuss the safest and most secure way to properly destroy the record. If you are considering using a professional service, make sure you're using a NAID (National Association of Information Destruction) AAA approved vendor as it signifies the highest level of excellence for information destruction.

Be sure document destruction rules are communicated with staff. It's also important that roles are clearly defined as to who has permission to handle the destruction of old records.

"Having records on hand for too long or too little can have a negative impact on your business," says Haas. "You will be very glad you took the time now to develop a records retention and destruction plan if or when you are audited."

For additional information on proper record destruction, visit www.arms4rim.com

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