



PROCEDURE 243.2-8

Title:	<b>VITAL RECORDS PROCEDURES</b>
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**ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1, Flow Chart of the Process

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**FORMS**

There are no forms in this procedure.

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1. **PURPOSE**

- a. This procedure establishes a process for the identification, protection, and retrieval of vital records needed by the National Energy Technology Laboratory (NETL) for continuity of operations before, during, and after emergencies and for those records needed to protect the legal and financial rights of the federal Government and individuals affected by government activities.

2. **APPLICABILITY**

- a. This procedure applies to all NETL employees.

3. **PROCEDURE**

- a. **Identify Vital Records** — Vital records include emergency plans and related records that specify how NETL is to respond to an emergency, as well as those records that would be needed to continue operations and protect legal and financial rights. NETL should consider the informational content of records series and electronic records systems when identifying vital records. Records should be reviewed at each geographic location and it should be determined if any of the records fall under the following categories:

- (1) **Emergency Operating Records** — Records essential to the continued functioning or reconstitution of an organization during and after an emergency. Included are emergency plans and directives(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.
- (2) **Legal and Financial Rights Records** — 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, retirement records, and insurance records.

Only the most recent and complete source of the vital information needs to be treated as vital records.

- b. **Protection Methods** — After identifying vital records, a protection method needs to be provided that best suits the record format. Vital records should be stored in a format that will last as long as the records are needed. If a vital record is in a format only readable by specific equipment (i.e., microfilm reader, computers), procedures for accessing/obtaining the equipment must be arranged. For example, if a vital record is in electronic format, then the hardware or software used to create the record also needs to be protected or arrangements made to obtain compatible equipment.

- (1) The main protection method for vital records is through duplication/dispersal of records. This entails the physical duplication of information and the transfer/

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dispersal of these duplicates to an on/offsite storage location. This method follows the premise that it is unlikely that both records, the original and the copy being stored at different locations, would be destroyed by the same disaster.

- (2) There are two ways of achieving duplication/dispersal:
  - Routine/Built In — The information is routinely distributed to other departments, offices, or individuals. This is the least expensive form of protection since it often occurs in the normal course of business, usually without offices being consciously aware of it.
  - Planned Reproduction — This represents the decision to duplicate or transfer the record onto a different format specifically for its protection. Microforms or magnetic media are the most common forms of reproduction. Electronic images or photocopies for the specific purpose of dispersing to a remote storage location.
- (3) Updating — Whichever method of duplication/dispersal is chosen, it should be pointed out that each must be a continuing process to be effective. Updating of records considered vital must be part of an ongoing vital records program. Vital records which are protected and are no longer up to date cease to be vital records. Therefore, a procedure must be in place to insure that NETL's vital records are kept current.
- (4) Computer backup tapes created in the normal course of system maintenance or other electronic copies that may be routinely created in the normal course of business may be used as the vital record copy.

c. Storage Considerations — After determining what method will be used to protect vital records, determining where and how to store the records is crucial. The location chosen will need to be accessible within seconds to 24 hours after a disaster. Vital records can be stored onsite, offsite, or in specialized equipment.

- (1) Onsite Storage — Means storing vital records in the same vicinity as your office but the drawback to onsite storage is that if a major disaster strikes the entire building or damages it beyond repair, you have little chance of retrieving your vital records. Some protection for NETL's vital records may be obtained by storing records in fire-resistant containers, file cabinets, safes, and vaults placed in areas designed for vital records storage.
- (2) Offsite Storage — Means storing the records away from the office, in another building or out of the geographical area. There are several options for offsite storage, including hot sites, cold sites, and records centers. Both hot and cold sites are usually affiliated with offices that rely heavily on the recovery or

availability of databases or electronic records for continuance of their normal operations.

- Hot Site — An area identified prior to an emergency/disaster as the operation center or meeting place from which the office staff will continue operations or restart normal operations. Hot sites contain everything your office has identified as critical for operation.
- Cold Site — A cold site is an area identified as a backup location in case the original office is unusable after a disaster. It differs from a hot site in that there is no pre-purchase of equipment or supplies which are stored at the cold site prior to an emergency. NETL Morgantown will be considered offsite storage for Pittsburgh and NETL Pittsburgh will be considered offsite storage for Morgantown.

(3) Specialized Equipment — The use of specialized equipment, such as vaults, fire-resistant cabinets, and/or fire-resistant safes, represents another type of onsite storage. While this equipment may provide some initial protection against fire damage, it may not be immune to water damage. Fire-resistant equipment is often used as a last resort when there is very little office space or no storage areas available to hold duplicated vital records. If specialized equipment is going to be used, it should be designed specifically for the type of record medium it contains and used exclusively for vital records.

d. Vital Records Control — Controls, based on the needs of the individual offices, must be established to monitor the vital records program. The following types of forms may be used to establish and maintain control:

(1) Vital Records Schedule — Retention schedules are created for all offices which create or file/store vital records. This schedule includes the vital records series and identifies how the records are to be protected, the frequency of the updates and any special instructions.

e. Records Recovery — Each office/program should establish and maintain a plan to recover records that are damaged in an emergency or disaster, regardless of their media. A list of records disaster recovery specialists including their areas of expertise, addresses, telephone numbers, and an individual point of contact should be prepared before a records emergency or disaster occurs. This list should be checked periodically to ensure that it remains accurate and current. Agencies should be aware that disaster recovery specialists often concentrate on very specific problems. One recovery specialist may focus on recovering water-damaged paper records, while another may concentrate on recovery of water-damaged magnetic tape. Consequently, agencies should develop as broad a listing of records disaster recovery specialists as possible to respond appropriately to all the potential risks to which all their recorded media might be subject.

4. **RESPONSIBILITIES**

a. **Records Officer**

- (1) Ensure that NETL has an effective vital records program in place.
- (2) Periodically (but at least annually) review this procedure and recommend revisions as necessary to cover changing site conditions or regulatory requirements.

b. **Records Management Office**

- (1) Oversee the vital records program for NETL.
- (2) Prepare and maintain directives and guidelines for NETL vital records in compliance with federal regulations.
- (3) Provide education and training to NETL employees on vital records.
- (4) Offer guidance and assistance to NETL employees.
- (5) Be responsible for maintaining the vital records inventory and disaster recovery listing.

c. **Vital Record Officers (Office Managers)**

- (1) Identify vital records and apply appropriate retention schedule.
- (2) Select the best protection method for the vital records.

d. **NETL Employees**

- (1) Comply with this procedure and other records management procedures as applicable.

5. **TRAINING**

- a. Training shall be offered to the general NETL population every year in the form of a computer-based training (CBT) course. Office managers or those who have been identified as vital records POCs shall be given specific, in-depth vital records training specific to their area. Pamphlets and other up-to-date information will be offered and also available on the Records Management homepage.

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6. **RECORD CONTROL**

- a. Vital records will be controlled through the use of the appropriate record schedules.

7. **REQUIREMENTS**

- a. DOE Order 243.2, [Vital Records](#).
- b. 36 CFR 1228, Disposition of Federal Records.
- c. 36 CFR 1228.162, Storing Legal and Financial Rights Records at an Off-Site Location.
- d. 36 CFR 1236, Vital Records During an Emergency.
- e. 44 U.S.C. 3101, Records Management by Federal Agencies.
- f. RM 2001-31, Vital Records Program.

8. **REFERENCES**

- a. Executive Order 12656, Assignment of Emergency Preparedness Responsibilities.
- b. Federal Preparedness Circular 65, Federal Executive Branch Continuity of Operations (COOP).

9. **DEFINITIONS**

- a. Disaster — An unexpected occurrence inflicting widespread destruction and distress and having long-term adverse effects on agency operations.
- b. Emergency — A situation or 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.
- c. Legal and Financial Rights Records — Records considered “vital records” 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, retirement records, and insurance records.
- d. 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.
- e. Offsite Storage — Offsite storage refers to a facility other than an agency’s normal place of business where vital records are stored for protection. This is to ensure that the vital

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records are not subject to damage or destruction from an emergency or disaster affecting an agency's normal place of business.

- f. Vital Records — Records essential for maintaining the continuity of government activities during a national emergency. The federal vital records program includes two basic categories: emergency operating records and rights and interests records.
- g. 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 to those of its citizens. This is a program element of agency's emergency management function.
- h. Vital Records Program Officer — The person responsible for implementing the NETL vital records protection program.

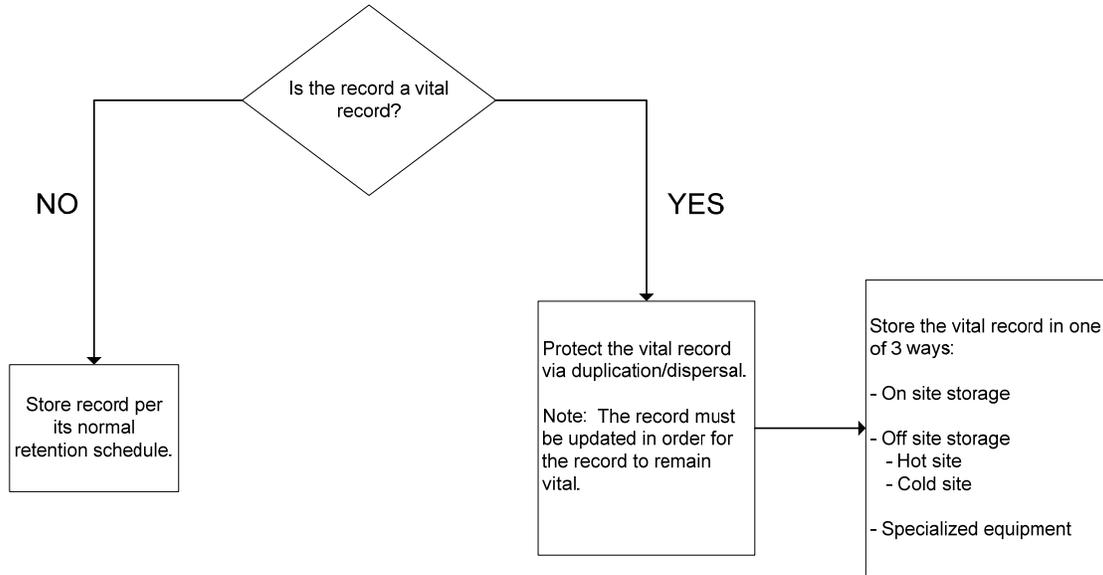
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10. **REVISION HISTORY**

VERSION	DATE	SUMMARY OF CHANGES
Original	4/4/08	This procedure establishes a process for the identification, protection, and retrieval of vital records needed by the National Energy Technology Laboratory (NETL) for continuity of operations before, during, and after emergencies and for those records needed to protect the legal and financial rights of the federal Government and individuals affected by government activities.

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FLOW CHART OF THE PROCESS



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