

## APPENDIX H

## DON Vital Records Program

**1. Introduction.** This Appendix sets forth the objectives and program guidelines of the DON Vital Records Program. The DON must be able to accomplish mission essential functions (MEFs) without unacceptable interruption during a national security emergency, or other emergency or disaster; and also protect the legal and financial rights of the DON and of individuals directly affected by its activities. The DON Vital Records Program is the means by which records needed to support the above are identified, stored, and protected. Management of vital records is an integral part of the Department's Continuity of Operations Program (COOP).

**2. Definitions.** The definitions in this section are taken from 36 C.F.R. § 1236.14.

- a. **Cycle** means 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.
- b. **Disaster** means an unexpected occurrence inflicting widespread destruction and distress and having long-term adverse effects on agency operations. Each agency defines what a long-term adverse effect is in relation to its most critical program activities.
- c. **Emergency** means 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.
- d. **Emergency operating records** are that type of vital records essential to the continued functioning or reconstitution 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.
- e. **Legal and financial rights records** are that type 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, retirement records, and insurance records. These records were formerly defined as "rights-and-interests" records.

f. **National security emergency** means 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.

g. **Off-site storage** means 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 records are not subject to damage or destruction from an emergency or disaster affecting an agency's normal place of business.

h. **Vital records** mean essential agency records that are needed to meet operational responsibilities under national security emergencies or other emergency or disaster conditions (emergency operating records) or to protect the legal and financial rights of the Government and those affected by Government activities (legal and financial rights records).

i. **Vital records program** means 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. This is a program element of an agency's emergency management function.

**3. Program Objectives.** The objectives of the DON Vital Records Program are to:

- a. Create and maintain current duplicative records at DON relocation sites adequate to support DON emergency actions and MEFs in National security emergencies, in accordance with 36 C.F.R. Part 1236 and DoD Directive 3020.26.
- b. Safeguard records essential to the reconstitution of DON organizations and the re-establishment of DON operations once the situation has stabilized.
- c. Provide for the preservation of legal and financial rights records of the DON and individuals directly affected by its activities.
- d. Standardize vital records selection, labeling, and storage procedures.
- e. Ensure all equipment needed to read vital records or copies of vital records will be available in case of emergency or disaster; and for electronic information systems, that system documentation adequate to operate the system and access the records will be available.
- f. Encourage the use of information technology solutions to ease the accounting, inventory review, and retrieval of vital records or copies of vital records.

**4. Responsibilities.**

- a. The Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) and the

Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC) are responsible for establishing and maintaining a robust Vital Records Program in the Navy and Marine Corps respectively, as an integral part of the Continuity of Operations Program (COOP). The Assistant for Administration to the Under Secretary of the Navy (AAUSN) is responsible for ensuring that provisions for the identification and protection of vital records are included in COOP plans and guidance for all organizations within the Office of the Secretary.

b. DON activities need to identify, inventory, protect, store, make accessible, and cycle (update as needed) the copies of vital records required in an emergency, including records that document legal and financial rights. Records Management personnel play a crucial role in providing guidance and assistance in inventorying records and determining appropriate maintenance practices for copies of vital records. Based on contingency planning analysis and identification of both emergency-operating records and those needed to protect legal and financial rights, program managers must determine which records within their physical or legal custody are vital.

c. Program Managers, in consultation with Records Management personnel, should then take steps to ensure that copies of those vital records are properly managed throughout their life, as they are updated, stored, and cycled. In addition, original vital records must be properly maintained until their authorized disposition in accordance with approved disposition schedules contained in Chapters 1 through 13 of this Manual.

## 5. **Vital Records Plan.**

a. DON activities should develop a vital records plan. The first part of the plan is a description of records that are vital to continued operations or for the protection of legal and financial rights. The plan also includes specific measures for storing and periodically cycling (updating) copies of those records. The Vital Records Plan should also address recovery of records (regardless of medium) that are damaged in an emergency or disaster.

b. The description of vital records is based on identification and inventorying. The following steps are involved in identifying vital records and records disaster mitigation, and should be performed in conjunction with COOP planning efforts:

(1) Review normal command/organization functions. Identify the categories of records relating to each of these functions. Review existing COOP plans and determine which functions are necessary during a national security emergency. After those functions are identified, earmark specific vital records for safeguarding.

(2) Review emergency functions assigned to command/organization and treat in same manner as

outlined in 3.a. above.

(3) Review documentation created for contingency planning and risk assessment phase of emergency preparedness (COOP documents). Such documentation will produce vital records material requiring proper safeguards.

(4) Review current file plans of offices that are responsible for performing mission essential functions.

(5) Review the records manual or records schedule to determine which records series potentially qualify as vital.

(6) Identify which records series or electronic information systems contain information needed to protect the legal and financial rights of the DON and persons directly affected by the organizations.

c. Caution must be exercised in designating records as vital and in conducting the vital records inventory. A review by the National Archives and Records Administration found that from 1 to 7 percent of Federal agency's records might be vital records. Only those records series or electronic information systems (or portions of them) most critical to emergency operations or the preservation of legal or financial rights should be so designated.

d. Records likely to be selected as vital include:

(1) Emergency-Operating records.

(a) Statements of mission in an emergency, and plans and programs for carrying out that mission

(b) Delegations of authority

(c) Orders of succession

(d) Organization and manning documents

(e) Pre-drafted directives or announcements to be issued immediately at the beginning of an emergency

(f) Emergency action programs that may have been drafted in skeleton form

(g) Vital records inventories

(h) Information about DON personnel, property, and activities sufficient to provide basis for damage assessments

(i) System documentation for any electronic information systems designated as emergency operating records

(j) Copies of basic regulations and procedures

(k) Lists of personnel assigned emergency duties, as well as lists of employees' skills that might be useful during and following an emergency.

(l) Industrial records such as engineering drawings, explanation of complex industrial processes, list of suppliers for items and materials not readily available, and similar items

**Note: This list is not inclusive.**

(2) Legal and Financial Rights Records.

(a) If DON is the statutory office of record for legal rights, it has primary responsibility for records protection.

(b) Fiscal records such as periodic summary of financial status of organization; records of significant amounts of money owed to DON, and records of debt owed by DON

**Note: This list is not inclusive.**

e. The inventory of vital records should include:

(1) The name of the office responsible for the records series or electronic information system containing vital information.

(2) The title of each records series or information system containing vital information.

(3) Identification of each series or system that contains emergency-operating vital records or vital records relating to rights.

(4) The medium on which the records are recorded.

(5) The physical location for offsite storage of copies of the records series or system.

(6) Classified documents should be labeled correctly. The command security manager must approve special space or equipment before storage of classified records begins.

f. Protection and Storage of Vital Records.

(1) After completion of the inventory, protection methods and storage sites must be chosen for vital records. The former may include using existing duplicates of the records designated as vital or duplicated for this purpose. If performing duplication, it is generally most economical to duplicate the original medium onto the same

medium; that is, duplicate microfiche onto microfiche or magnetic tape onto magnetic tape.

(2) Appropriate equipment should be selected to ensure the continued preservation of copies of the vital records until they are cycled. In addition, organizations should ensure proper environmental conditions for storage of copies of vital records, particularly for those recorded on fragile media such as microfilm or magnetic tape or disks, until they are replaced.

(3) Given the importance of vital records, if possible, organizations should arrange for offsite storage of copies in a facility not subject to the same emergency or disaster but still reasonably accessible to personnel. Current duplicative records necessary to support DON MEFs in National security emergencies shall be stored at DON relocation sites. Periodic cycling (updating) of copies of vital records is essential.

## 6. Training

a. Personnel assigned responsibilities in the Vital Records Program should receive appropriate training. Periodic briefings should be given to senior managers, especially those new to the organization, about the vital records program and its relationship to their records.

b. Appropriate personnel such as records managers or administrative officers should ensure that all personnel within the organization receive training appropriate to their assigned duties. Such training generally focuses on the identification, inventorying, protection, storage, and cycling of copies of the activities vital records. Wherever possible it should be integrated with existing training initiatives, particularly in such areas as records management and continuity of operations (COOP) planning and operations.

## 7. Reviews and Testing

a. The vital records program should be reviewed at least annually to determine whether vital records are adequately protected, current, and accessible to personnel who would use them.

b. In addition, valuable information for improving the program can be obtained by testing it under simulated emergency or disaster conditions.