



U.S. Geological Survey Manual

433.3 – Essential Records

Date:

OPR: Office of Enterprise Information

Instruction: Replaces Survey Manual Chapter (SMC) 433.3 Vital Records, dated April 16, 1987.

1. **Purpose.** This chapter establishes policy for identifying, storing, maintaining, and reporting the essential records program necessary for the Continuity of Operations program in the event of a natural or man-made emergency or situations that may disrupt normal operations.
2. **Scope.** This policy applies to all U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) employees.
3. **Authorities.**
 - A. Federal Continuity Directive 1, Annex F, Essential Records Management
 - B. Federal Continuity Directive 2, Federal Executive Branch Mission Essential Functions and Candidate Primary Mission Essential Functions Identification and Submission Process
 - C. 36 CFR 1223, Managing Vital Records
 - D. National Institutes of Standards Technology (NIST), Special Publication 800-34 Rev. 1, Contingency Planning Guide for Federal Information Systems
4. **Policy.** The Essential Records Program consists of several activities required to support the USGS's readiness in the event of an incident that negatively affects local or national capabilities that requires a reduced focused application of resources for pre-defined responsibilities referred to as mission essential functions and essential support activities. Program activities include the following:
 - A. Reviewing Mission Essential Functions (MEF) and Essential Support Activities (ESA) to determine what records would be needed to meet these requirements under emergency conditions factoring in internal or external organizations collocated in USGS physical space;
 - B. Identifying records required under emergency conditions in approved systems for access in the event of COOP activation;
 - C. Developing and publishing guidelines and procedures for protecting and maintaining the essential records;
 - D. Reviewing essential records operations for adequacy and completeness

- annually;
- E. Training personnel concerned with essential records, guiding them on their Essential Records (ER) responsibilities including the identification, accessibility, storage, and refresh frequency if applicable;
 - F. Testing operations under simulated emergency conditions to ensure that procedures are adequate, and the records selected for protection are kept current and maintained in a state of readiness; and
 - G. Planning for mitigating damage and restoring records in the event of damage to records during the course of the emergency such as water damage from flooding, fire or office fire suppression systems using water or chemicals and other related issues.
 - H. Records recovery extends to more than the essential records, but this recovery is secondary to the preservation of life and biological safety. In the event of a disaster that has or potentially has damaged records, notify the Bureau Essential Records Officer and take steps to prevent new or additional damage to bureau records.

5. Definitions.

- A. *Continuity of Operations Program (COOP)* are those activities within individual executive departments and agencies to ensure that designated MEFs and ESAs continue to be performed during a wide range of emergencies, including localized acts of nature, accidents and technological or attack-related emergencies.
- B. *Emergency Operating Records* is a category of records related to the essential functions of the USGS for the duration of an emergency if this country is attacked, and comprises organization and staffing records, directives for emergency operation, and substantive records basic to implementation of emergency operations (refer to SMC 1000.1 Emergency Planning and Operations: Purpose, Policy, Procedure).
- C. *Essential Records (ER)* consist of information needed to ensure continuity of Federal Government operations in the event of a natural or man-made disaster. These records also include the hardware and software necessary to access the information. ER are grouped into four (4) categories: Emergency operations during a disaster or a national emergency; resumption and/or continuation of operations; reestablishment of the legal, financial, and/or functional status of an agency; and determination of the rights and obligations of individuals and/or corporate bodies with respect to an agency. This term replaces the previously used "vital records."
- D. *Essential Records Officer (ERO)* is responsible for ensuring the identification of essential records for meeting mission requirements and supporting the essential activities.
- E. *Essential Support Activities (ESA)* are defined as critical functions that an organization must continue during the emergency and results in a service being delivered to another part of the same organization. Supporting activities are

typically enablers that make it possible for an organization to accomplish its MEFs.

- F. *Mission Essential Functions (MEF)* are a broader set of functions that organizations must continue throughout or resume rapidly after a disruption of normal activities. MEFs are those functions that enable an organization to provide required services, exercise civil authority, maintain the safety of the public, and sustain the industrial/economic base. MEFs are related to the agency mission and capabilities.
- G. *National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)* is a small independent agency who has oversight for the Federal Government on records management including ER and records preservation, recovery, and destruction guidance and notification requirements.
- H. *Records Recovery* are those efforts to prevent additional damage, recover, and preserve Federal records that inhibit the compliance with retention requirements required in the records schedules.
- I. *Reestablishment of the legal, financial and or functional status* is a phrase used to describe essential records for reconstituting agency legal authority and continuing functions.
- J. *Rights and Interests Records* describe one category of essential records related to the preservation of rights and interests of individual citizens and of the Federal Government. These include Social Security deposits, retirement, payroll, and insurance records, and other evidence of amounts due individuals or the Federal Government.
- K. *Rights and obligations of individuals and/or corporate bodies* is a category of essential records that protects obligations owed to USGS by parties.

6. Responsibilities.

- A. *Associate Directors, Office Chiefs and Center Directors* are responsible for ensuring staff collaborates with the ERO in identifying essential records and the hardware or software needed to access them. Submit questions and issues to gs_essentialrecords@usgs.gov.
- B. *Bureau Emergency Management Coordinator (BEMC)* is responsible for the following:
 - (1) Advising the USGS Director and/or Deputy Director, Senior Executive managers, and other officials, as appropriate, and the Department of the Interior (DOI);
 - (2) Ensuring the development of COOP plans and periodically testing the implementation and the readiness of the bureau responding to a COOP event in coordination with the department as appropriate;
 - (3) Coordinating with the Executive Leaders Team (ELT) to ensure awareness and understanding of COOP requirements and ensure compliance with requirements are met, as warranted, throughout the Mission/Office each

ELT leads;

- (4) Managing responsibilities during an emergency, including defining the nature of the emergency, coordinating response activities, and recommending courses of action;
 - (5) Ensuring that reports on response activities are delivered to leadership, the Interior Operations Center, and other partners as necessary, and ensuring that requests for information are addressed appropriately.
- C. *USGS Essential Records Officer (ERO)* is responsible for the following:
- (1) Managing and leading the Essential Records Program;
 - (2) Coordinating with the USGS Emergency Management Coordinator who oversees COOP activation and annual testing;
 - (3) Coordinating with USGS personnel to identify essential records;
 - (4) Ensuring the identification and accessibility of essential records for continuity of operations and the protection of people and the government;
 - (5) Notifying the NARA of the potential or confirmed damage or destruction to Federal records;
 - (6) Conducting an annual review of the MEF and ESA to validate the essential records identified and the corresponding hardware and software necessary to access them.
- D. *Records Officer* is responsible for the bureau Records Management Program. This requires notifying NARA if there are any alleged or actualized incidents of unauthorized destruction, manipulation, alteration or removal through accidental or intentional means. This would include records damaged due to emergencies.
- E. *USGS Employees* are responsible for following protocols established by Science Center Directors and Cost Center/Office Chiefs for ensuring access to essential records and developing a plan for addressing damaged records to recover and prevent future damage to records in accordance with the Federal regulations. In the event of an emergency, employees are responsible for notifying the USGS Records Officer if any records are in danger of being lost or damaged.

7. General Procedures: Methods for Storage and Safeguarding Essential Records.

The method of storing and safeguarding the essential records is left to the discretion of the Mission, Cost Center or Science Center based on various factors including the business need, the volume, and accessibility needs. The following methods are considered acceptable and meet Federal guidelines:

- A. *Dispersed Records Within USGS Facilities.* Most often essential records are maintained as duplicate copies with the duplicate sets on file at separate locations within the USGS. This method is considered the most economical and effective method of protecting essential records provided the locations of these documents are

known. Recommendation is to use a site at least 50 miles from the original site.

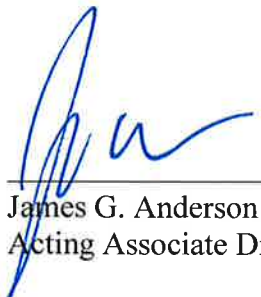
- B. *Storage at Alternate Sites.* Storage of essential records at designated relocation sites is permissible. When considering this method of storage, consideration must be given to the availability of special equipment to access it, transportation requirements, security, refresh or replacement frequency, and method of updating and maintaining the records. Recommendation is to use an alternate site at least 50 miles from the original site.
- C. *Essential Records Storage at Federal Records Centers (FRCs).* The National Archives provides for the storage, protection and servicing of rights and interests essential records. The facilities of all Federal records centers, regardless of geographic location, are available for agencies desiring to store these records.

In addition to storage space for paper records, each NARA records center has environmentally controlled space suitable for the storage of essential records on magnetic tape and photographic film. USGS offices may make arrangements for the transfer of their rights and interests records to any of the records centers. Identification of the essential record and its purpose must be captured in the bureau Essential Records Inventory and documented on the FRC paperwork.

8. Notification and Records Recovery. In the event of a disaster that has or has potentially damaged records, notify the Bureau Essential Records Officer and take steps to prevent new or additional damage to bureau records. For example, damaging mold can start to grow within 24 hours of exposure to water from sprinkler systems or flooding.

- A. *Notification to the Records Officer of any events that has caused records damage after safety of affected personnel has been secured.* The USGS Records Management Program is required to notify NARA of any damage or destruction to Federal records that prevent the compliance with records schedules (refer to SMC 431.1 Records Management Program).
- B. *Records Recovery.* Each Mission, Office and science center should include records recovery in its COOP plan with specific procedures for personnel to follow in the event of an emergency or disaster. The plan should include local vendors who can provide records recovery support, such as a freezer truck for suspending additional damage from mold due to water exposure.

9. Expiration Date. This policy must be reviewed biennially, or more frequently as needed to maintain current information.



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Acting Associate Director for Administration

12/21/18

Date