

**Forest Service Handbook
National Headquarters - Washington Office
Washington, DC**

**Forest Service Handbook 6209.11 – Records Management Handbook
Chapter 50 - Records Management in Emergency Operations**

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Responsible Staff:

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Digest: Following is an explanation of the changes throughout the directive by section.

50: Revises entire chapter.

50.1-50.4: Adds sections for Authority, Objectives, Policy, and Responsibility.

50.5: Updates definitions. Adds definitions for disaster, emergency operating information, essential records, legal and financial rights information, national security emergency,

51: Changes code, caption, from “Responsibilities of a Physical Unit Regarding Vital Records.” to “Processing of Essential Records” and sets forth direction.

51.1: Changes code and caption from “Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP)” to “Identifying Essential Records” and sets forth direction. Adds direction on identifying essential records. Moves direction concerning records requirements for Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) from 51.1 to 51.3.

51.2: Adds requirement for inventory of essential records.

51.3: Removes direction from 51.1 on Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) and adds requirement for inventory of essential records to be included in unit COOP plans.

Forest Service Handbook 6209.11 – Records Management Handbook

Chapter 50 - Records Management in Emergency Operations

Amendment: 6209.11-2017-6

Effective date: June 29, 2017

51.4: Removes direction from 52.1 on storage and protection of vital records. Renames section “Storage of Essential Records”

51.5: Adds direction on retrieval of essential records.

51.6: Adds direction on protection of essential records and information.

51.7: Adds direction on disposition of records.

52: Changes code and caption from “Processing of Vital Records” to “Preservation and Accountability of Records in an Emergency Situation” and sets forth direction.

53: Add direction for training requirements for safeguarding records.

54: Adds direction for reviewing and testing records COOP plan.

Table of Contents

50.1 - Authority	4
50.2 - Objective	4
50.3 - Policy	4
50.4 - Responsibility.....	4
50.41 - Chief, Deputy Chiefs, Regional Foresters, Station Directors, National Forest and Grassland Supervisors, and District Rangers	4
50.42 - Washington Office of Homeland Security, Director.....	5
50.43 - COOP Points of Contact.....	6
50.44 - Essential Records Coordinators	6
50.45 - Agency Records Officer	7
50.45a - Records Managers	7
50.45b - Records Liaisons	8
50.46 - Chief Information Officer (CIO) and Information Technology Managers	8
50.47 - Program Managers	8
50.48 - All Employees, Contractors and Volunteers	9
50.5 - Definitions	9
51 - Processing of Essential Records	12
51.1 - Identifying Essential Records	12
51.2 - Inventory of Essential Records.....	13
51.3 - Inclusion of Records Inventories in Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP).....	13
51.4 - Storage of Essential Records.....	13
51.5 - Retrieval of Essential Records.....	14
51.6 - Protection of Essential Records and Information.....	14
51.7 - Disposition of Records.....	15
52 - Preservation and Accountability of Records In an Emergency Situation	15
53 - Training	16
54 - Review and Testing	16

50.1 - Authority

In addition to the authorities issued via FSM 6230, Records Management Program and elsewhere in FSH 6209.11, Records Management Handbook, the following authorities are applicable to the Essential Records program.

Executive Order (EO) 12656. This Executive Order assigns emergency preparedness responsibilities, identifies essential functions for the Federal Government and its agencies, and mandates that NARA must develop procedures for providing instructions on the handling and preservation of records.

50.2 - Objective

Per 36 CFR 1223.12, the Agency must outline the policies and responsibilities for identifying and protecting records necessary for the Agency to continue its essential functions and activities during and following an emergency, disaster, or event that could cause the disruption of normal operations (including, but not limited to, National Security Emergencies).

50.3 - Policy

The Forest Service is committed to working with its employees to protect and safeguard essential records. This directive sets forth the Agency's policy and responsibilities in developing an essential records management program. The intent is to ensure that essential records are identified, maintained and protected and no loss of critical information occurs during or after an emergency or disaster.

To achieve compliance with the Agency's Essential Records Program, the Agency shall:

1. Specify Agency staff responsibilities;
2. Appropriately inform all staff about essential records;
3. Ensure that the designation of essential records is current and complete; and
4. Ensure that essential records are adequately protected, accessible, and immediately usable.

50.4 - Responsibility

50.41 - Chief, Deputy Chiefs, Regional Foresters, Station Directors, National Forest and Grassland Supervisors, and District Rangers

In addition to those responsibilities set for in FSM 6230-41d, item 8, the Chief, Deputy Chiefs, Regional Foresters, Station Directors, National Forest and Grassland Supervisor, and District Rangers shall:

Forest Service Handbook 6209.11 – Records Management Handbook
Chapter 50 - Records Management in Emergency Operations
Amendment: 6209.11-2017-6
Effective date: June 29, 2017

1. Designate COOP Points of Contact.
2. Designate an essential records coordinator to implement, maintain and oversee the essential records management program.
3. Ensure agency and staff office essential records management programs are in compliance with Departmental, organization specific, and NARA requirements and guidelines.
4. Identify and select those records essential to agency-wide effectiveness during and after an emergency or disaster. This includes selecting the appropriate media for storing records.
5. Ensure that essential records are protected against damage and loss.
6. Ensure that records, selected for inclusion in the essential records management program, are current, complete, protected, and readily available to facilitate the continuity of Forest Service operations during and after an emergency or disaster.
7. Ensure that their staff are aware of and execute appropriate measures to identify and protect essential records.

50.42 - Washington Office of Homeland Security, Director

It is the responsibility of the Washington Office of Homeland Security, Director to:

1. Maintain a current master list of Essential Records Coordinators and COOP Points of Contact.
2. Provide a list of COOP points of contact and essential records coordinators to the Deputy Chief, Business Operations, Director, Law Enforcement and Investigations, and the Agency Records Officer.
3. Ensure audits of Washington Office staff and field unit essential records management programs are conducted on a regular schedule to ensure compliance with organization specific, Departmental, and NARA requirements and guidelines. Report audit results to the Deputy Chief – Business Operations. Audits shall analyze and report on currency, adequacy, and completeness of essential records programs, including but not limited to:
 - a. Lists of identified essential records and essential records coordinators.
 - b. Storage (physical and electronic) of essential records.
 - c. Completeness, adequacy, and accessibility of the essential record copies retained for use during and after an emergency or disaster.

50.43 - COOP Points of Contact

It is the responsibility of the COOP Points of Contact at all levels of the organization to:

1. Coordinate with the Forest Service Office of Homeland Security regarding the transfer of essential records and duplicated essential records to the COOP Emergency Relocation Facilities (ERF) and Devolution Site storage facility. Ensure the stored essential records inventory is maintained up to date and complete at all times.
2. Manage the transfer of essential records and duplicated essential records to the Agency and staff office COOP ERF and Devolution Site storage facility. Ensure the stored essential records inventory is maintained up to date and complete at all times.
3. In conjunction with the Agency and staff office essential Records Coordinators and agency records personnel, ensures that copies of essential records are properly managed throughout their life cycle as they are updated, stored, and replaced in accordance with established requirements.
4. Maintain copies of completed transmittal forms and the essential records inventory for the Agency.
5. Certify the currency of their organization's essential records inventory located at the COOP ERF and Devolution Site, and the organization's own ERF and Devolution Site to the Agency Records Officer following completion of a scheduled quarterly essential records inventory review and update.
6. Ensure a select master set of Federal, USDA and agency directives, handbooks, forms and other issuances, both administrative and technical, are available electronically and in hard copy at their agency's ERF and Devolution Site.

50.44 - Essential Records Coordinators

Essential Records Coordinators are individuals who are involved in actual COOP activities and work directly with the COOP Program Manager. While the COOP Essential Records Coordinator may also be the Unit Records Manager or Liaison, this is not usually the case.

It is the responsibility of the Essential Records Coordinators at all levels of the organization to:

1. Be responsible for the direct management and implementation of agency and organization specific Essential Records Management Program policies, management procedures and access instructions, and all applicable guidance promulgated by NARA and the Federal Government;
2. Work with the Agency and staff office Records Officers to ensure the proper identification and selection of essential records, use of suitable storage media, and the maintenance of appropriate inventories;

3. Be directly responsible for the currency, completeness, accessibility, proper storage, and protection against damage and loss of the essential records inventory at the Washington Office, their organization's ERFs and Devolution Sites;
4. In coordination with Records Officer, Records Managers, Records Liaisons, Records Coordinators, Program Managers, IT Managers, employees, contractors, and volunteers as applicable, complete review and updates of the organization's essential records inventory once a quarter at a minimum and otherwise as needed. Upon completion of the review, provide a copy of the inventory certified as current to the Records Officer and COOP POCs;
5. Ensure that agency and staff office personnel are aware of and execute appropriate measures to identify and protect essential records;
6. Ensure essential records are readily available to facilitate Forest Service continuity of operations during and following an emergency, disaster, or event that could cause the disruption of normal operations;
7. Conduct an annual comprehensive essential records program inventory review, documented with the date the review was conducted and the name of the reviewer; and
8. Conduct initial on-boarding and annual essential records briefings, and training sessions of COOP personnel, and ensure that their agency or staff office personnel are aware of and execute appropriate measures to identify and protect essential records.

50.45 - Agency Records Officer

It is the responsibility of the Agency Records Officer to:

1. Ensure that Essential Records Coordinators are aware of any changes or updates to the Agency's schedule of records that would affect the essential records inventory or Office Records List;
2. Disseminate list of COOP points of contact and essential Records Coordinators to Agency Records Managers; and

50.45a - Records Managers

It is the responsibility of Records Managers to:

1. Ensure that Essential Records Coordinators are aware of any changes or updates to the Agency's schedule of records that would affect the essential records inventory or Office Records List;
2. Disseminate list of COOP points of contact and Essential Records Coordinators to Agency Records Liaisons; and

3. Assist unit COOP Points of Contact and Essential Records Coordinators with the identification of essential records.

50.45b - Records Liaisons

It is the responsibility of Records Liaisons to:

1. Ensure that unit Essential Records Coordinators are aware of any changes or updates to the Agency's schedule of records that would affect the essential records inventory or Office Records List; and
2. Assist unit COOP Points of Contact and Essential Records Coordinators with the identification of essential records.

50.46 - Chief Information Officer (CIO) and Information Technology Managers

It is the responsibility of the Chief Information Officer and Information Technology Managers to:

1. Provide information technology (IT) support sufficient to support the effective and efficient production, storage, maintenance and retrieval of essential records in electronic formats;
2. Provide technical advice and guidance by reviewing and assisting with hardware and software required to support the essential records program;
3. Take steps to eliminate IT vulnerabilities that could threaten agency essential records;
4. Procure, install, and upgrade, as appropriate, IT systems, software and equipment sufficient to support the essential records program including the implementation of redundant IT systems; and
5. Ensure the appropriate replication and recovery of databases containing vital information.

50.47 - Program Managers

It is the responsibility of Program Managers to:

1. Ensure essential records are identified, updated and protected; and
2. Ensure that their staffs are aware of and execute appropriate measures to identify and protect essential records.

50.48 - All Employees, Contractors and Volunteers

It is the responsibility of all Employees, Contractors, and Volunteers to:

1. Assist in the identification and protection of essential records; and
2. Assist the Essential Records Coordinator in identifying new essential records and those records no longer considered vital.

50.5 - Definitions

Contingency Planning. Instituting policies and procedures to mitigate the effects of potential emergencies on agency operations and records. Contingency planning is part of the Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) required under Federal law and guidelines (FSM 6230.5).

Cycle. The periodic removal of obsolete copies of essential records and their replacement with copies of current essential records. This may occur daily, weekly, quarterly, or annually in order to keep the records current and up to date.

Disaster. An unexpected occurrence inflicting widespread destruction and distress and having long-term adverse effects on agency operations.

Emergency. See FSM 6230. Examples of an emergency are:

1. Natural Disaster;
2. Man-made and Technological Hazards; and
3. Terrorism.

Emergency Operating Information. See FSM 6230, Emergency Operating Records. Emergency Operating Information is also called Type I Information. This information consists of copies of Emergency Operating Records and is needed during the first 24 to 48 hours of an emergency; for the Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan, it is needed from the first 12 hours to up to 30 days during the emergency. It establishes the legal status of the organization, provides explicit guidance on authority, and sets the stage for the Agency to reconstitute itself after the emergency passes. Included are:

1. Selected program records needed to continue the most critical agency operations, as well as related policy or procedural records that assist agency staffs in conducting operations under emergency conditions.
2. Records necessary to resume operations during and immediately after an emergency.

Forest Service Handbook 6209.11 – Records Management Handbook
Chapter 50 - Records Management in Emergency Operations
Amendment: 6209.11-2017-6
Effective date: June 29, 2017

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- a. Program records and copies of program records in the appropriate format needed to continue critical agency functions;
- b. Statements of agency missions in an emergency;
- c. Primary Mission Essential Functions (PMEFs) documentation;
- d. Mission Essential Functions (MEFs) documentation;
- e. Delegations of authority and Orders of Succession;
- f. Regulations or announcements to be issued immediately at the beginning or end of an emergency or disaster;
- g. Emergency plans and directive(s), or other authorizing issuances, including information needed to operate the emergency operations center and its equipment, and records recovery plans and procedures;
- h. Emergency operations center access credentials and classified or restricted access container documentation (as required);
- i. Lists of employees assigned emergency duties, along with their addresses and telephone numbers (and comparable data for alternates), assigned to the emergency operations center or other emergency duties or authorized access to damaged facilities to assess the extent of damage;
- j. Emergency staffing assignments and related policy or procedural records and standard operating procedures (SOPs);
- k. Information concerning the locations of essential records;
- l. Documents describing the records series and electronic information systems maintained at official filing stations for all agency facilities;
- m. Building plans and building systems operations manuals for all agency facilities;
- n. Equipment inventories for all agency facilities;
- o. System documentation and manuals for any electronic information systems designated as emergency-operating records and as required to continue operations;
- p. Policy or procedural records that assist agency staff in conducting operations under emergency conditions and for resuming normal operations after an emergency;
- q. Devolution Plans; and

r. Reconstitution Plans.

Emergency Records Management Program. The series of 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 emergency 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.

Essential Records. See FSM 6230. Agencies retain copies of identified essential records at specified locations, such as Agency COOP sites.

Legal and Financial Rights Information. See FSM 6230 – Legal and Financial Rights Records. Legal and Financial Rights Information consists of copies of Legal and Financial Rights Records and is also called Type II Information. This information documents the assets and liabilities of an organization. This group of information will be far more voluminous than Type I information. Once a disaster is over and the Agency begins to return to normal, this information will be needed to re-create legal and financial operations and protect the rights of the organization and the individuals with whom it deals.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

1. Information about agency personnel, property, damage, and assessment data; and
2. Fiscal records such as periodic summaries of financial status and records of monies received by and owed to the Government:
 - a. Land titles;
 - b. Records relating to contracts, entitlements, leases, or obligations whose loss would pose a significant risk to the legal and financial rights of the Federal Government or persons directly affected by its actions;
 - c. Personnel Records; payroll, retirement, Social Security, and insurance records;
 - d. Memoranda of Understanding;
 - e. Grants and agreements files;
 - f. Accounts receivable and payable;
 - g. Property management and inventory; and
 - h. Any additional Legal and Financial Rights information considered critical for continued performance of essential functions.

National Security Emergency. See FSM 6230.5, Definitions.

Office Records List (ORL). Formerly the Records Plan. Each site must include a copy of the ORL in the office's Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). The ORL is essential for making decisions on which records should be recovered first, in the event of an emergency.

Offsite Storage. See FSM 6230.

Type I Information. See Emergency Operating Information.

Type II Information. See Legal and Financial Rights Information.

Vital Records. See Essential Records.

51 - Processing of Essential Records

The program elements for processing essential records at each site are as follows, but not limited to:

1. Essential records must be identified, inventoried, and included in each site's Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP).
2. Duplicate records may be automatically created during the normal course of business and cycled to offsite storage. Alternatively, each site may set up a scheduled time at regular intervals to duplicate and cycle records to offsite storage.
3. Duplicate essential records must be regularly cycled. The frequency of cycling is based on the medium, needs, and the use of the information contained in the records. Cycling may occur at weekly, monthly, quarterly, or annual intervals.
4. A duplicate copy of essential records must be easily located, readily retrievable, and in a usable condition during an emergency.
5. Duplication, cycling, and storage of essential records must be a regular part of the business process.

51.1 - Identifying Essential Records

Agency personnel shall identify essential records in the context of the emergency management function. Essential records are those records containing information needed to perform the most critical functions of the Agency and those needed to protect legal and financial rights of the Government and of the persons affected by its actions. Only those records needed during and after an emergency should be designated as essential records.

Distinction must be made between important records and essential records. Records that are truly vital are essential for mission-critical, business operations and are irreplaceable. The

contents of essential records cannot be re-created, and the operations supported by these records cannot be performed without them. Official Agency records meeting the criteria of the definitions found in FSM 6230.5 for Emergency Operating and Legal and Financial Rights records are essential records.

Essential records can be original records or copies of records (essential information). Regardless of the medium used for the official record, essential information found in these records may be maintained on a variety of media including paper, magnetic tape, optical disk, photographic film, and microforms. In selecting the storage media for essential information, agency employees shall ensure that the equipment needed to read the specific media will be available following an emergency or disaster.

51.2 - Inventory of Essential Records

Each site will prepare an inventory of essential records which will include the following information:

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 essential records or essential 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; and
6. The frequency with which the records are to be cycled (updated).

51.3 - Inclusion of Records Inventories in Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP)

An inventory of essential records must be included in each site's Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). Each office must also include a copy of the Office Records List (ORL), formerly the Records Plan, in their COOP. The ORL is essential for making decisions on which records should be recovered first, in the event of an emergency.

51.4 - Storage of Essential Records

Each physical unit is responsible for protection of essential official records and is required to duplicate and store a copy of all essential records at the designated COOP offsite location. The offsite storage facility must be far enough away from the original site that both will not be affected by the same emergency, except in those cases where an offsite facility has been identified and is currently in use. These include:

1. Washington Office National Sites. Store essential records at the Agency's emergency relocations site (BRAVO) and the devolution site (CHARLIE), according to the Chief's COOP Plan for National Emergencies.
2. Federal Regional Council Cities and Federal Regional Centers. Maintain emergency records essential to Forest Service members on the USDA Regional Emergency Staffs at the Federal Regional Council Cities and Federal Regional Centers (FSM 1590).
3. USDA State Food and Agriculture Councils. The Forest Service representative on each USDA State Food and Agriculture Council shall maintain the reference material required for emergency operations.
4. Regional Federal Records Centers. In some cases, these centers are available to store duplicate copies of essential records. Non-federal offsite storage facilities used to store original official records must meet the records storage requirements established by the National Archives and Records Administration in 36 CFR part 1236.

Equipment needed for reading the essential records must be immediately available offsite, or stored with records in the offsite location, so the records are readable in an emergency situation.

51.5 - Retrieval of Essential Records

Agency employees shall establish retrieval procedures for essential records that are easily implemented, especially since individuals unfamiliar with the records may need to use them in an emergency. For electronic records systems, the Agency must also ensure that appropriate hardware, software, and system documentation adequate to operate the system and access the records will be available in case of an emergency.

51.6 - Protection of Essential Records and Information

Agency personnel shall take appropriate measures to ensure the survival of essential records or copies of essential records in case of an emergency.

1. Duplication. Authorized Agency personnel may choose to duplicate essential records as the primary protection method. Duplication can be to the same medium as the original record or to a different medium. When choosing duplication as a protection method, the copy of the essential record stored off-site is normally a duplicate of the original record. The original record may be stored off-site at an authorized Federal facility if protection of the original record is necessary.
2. Dispersal. Once records are duplicated, the copies should be dispersed to sites that are a sufficient distance away to avoid being subject to the same emergency. Dispersal sites must be designated in the unit COOP plan.

3. Storage considerations:

- a. Copies of emergency operating records (also known as emergency operating or Type I information) must be accessible in a very short period of time for use in the event of an emergency.
- b. Copies of legal and financial rights records (also known as legal and financial rights or Type II information) may not be needed as quickly.
- c. In deciding where to store essential information, Agency employees shall treat information that has the properties of both categories (Type I and Type II) as emergency operating records.
- d. Agency personnel shall periodically cycle (update) Type I and Type II essential information and replace obsolete items with the most recent version.

4. Storage of essential official records.

- a. Closed official records designated as essential may be sent to Federal Records Centers for storage.
- b. Records personnel shall retain documentation indicating which records in FRC storage are Type I and Type II essential records, and update this information as needed (for example, when records stored at FRC are superseded by updated version).

51.7 - Disposition of Records

1. Maintain original essential records as specified in FSH 6209.11, Records Management, chapter 40 or NARA approved records retention schedules. Officials may not dispose of the official records prior to the authorized disposal date or retain official records beyond assigned disposition date except in situations in which records might be relevant to pending or threatened litigation or as authorized by NARA.
2. Delete duplicate copies of essential records stored in separate locations when obsolete or superseded, and replace with updated revisions. Duplicate copies created and maintained for essential records purposes only may be destroyed when superseded or obsolete during the routine essential records cycle process.

52 - Preservation and Accountability of Records In an Emergency Situation

1. Guidance on recovery of damaged records and reporting unauthorized destruction of official records is set forth in chapter 20, section 24 of this handbook.
2. Agency records can be damaged or destroyed in many ways, such as by weather conditions, fire, flooding, insects, rodents, leaking roofs, building collapse, or cyber-attack. Intervention or mitigation to prevent damage or destruction of Agency records

must be made immediately, unless doing so would present a threat to life, health or property.

3. Units must include strategy in COOP plan for removal of Agency records at risk for damage or destruction in emergency situations. Priority will be given to removal of essential records and records containing PII or information protected by statute.

4. In the event of an emergency, the unit Line Officer (or designated agent) shall determine whether identified essential records or records containing confidential or protected information should be removed from the facility for safekeeping.

a. If the answer is yes, the records should then be transported to the nearest Forest Service or Federal facility outside the emergency area.

b. If the answer is no, then steps must be taken to secure the records on site. If it is not possible to secure the records, the unit Line Officer shall contact the Agency Records Officer or assigned Records Manager, who shall contact NARA for guidance.

53 - Training

All Agency employees should receive appropriate training regarding their responsibilities to safeguard records. Briefings about the program should be directed to all employees in combination with other emergency preparedness activities devoted to such topics as fire drills or building evacuation drills. Units should also train members of the records disaster recovery team and any designated alternate members so they may assist the official who is coordinating disaster recovery in time of need.

54 - Review and Testing

The records Disaster Recovery Program Coordinator should conduct a periodic review of the records COOP plan with the assistance of selected agency officials to determine its adequacy and accuracy.