



## Mission

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The mission of the Georgia Archives is to identify, select, preserve and make accessible the records that constitute Georgia's recorded history; to increase the efficiency of the state government through effective records management; and to improve the quality of records and archives management statewide.

### Hours

Tuesday-Saturday, 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.  
Closed to the public on Mondays

*Closed for state and most federal holidays and on the Saturday immediately following a Friday holiday or preceding a Monday holiday.*

### Contact us

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### Online

[www.GeorgiaArchives.org](http://www.GeorgiaArchives.org)



## E-Mail Retention Guidelines

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**What Georgia's officials and employees need to know**



**THE GEORGIA ARCHIVES**

# E-Mail = Record

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**E-mail is a record**, just like any other record you produce or receive in the course of business. It must be retained, filed, and disposed of according to state retention schedules. These guidelines will help you manage your e-mail.

## 7 Things to Know

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**1. Know your retention schedules.** Review the schedules that govern your agency's records:

A. The *General Schedule* governs documents found in all state offices (correspondence, phone logs, etc.) and can be found online at [www.GeorgiaArchives.org/RIMS](http://www.GeorgiaArchives.org/RIMS).

B. *Agency-Specific Schedules* are produced for any record not found in the General Schedule. Your agency Records Management Officer (RMO) keeps a copy of all Agency-Specific Schedules. They can also be found at [www.GeorgiaArchives.org/RIMS](http://www.GeorgiaArchives.org/RIMS).

**2. E-mails are public.** E-mails can be requested under the Open Records Act by members of the public, journalists, and anyone else in the state. Be careful what you say in an e-mail.

“ *court cases surrounding personal emails sent from work have...essentially [ruled] that when an employee uses the company email system to send an email it is no longer personal and First Amendment rights do not apply\** ”

**3. Set up folders for your e-mail.** If you received 50 letters a day, you would not file every incoming piece of correspondence in one folder, yet many people do this with e-mail. Set up folders, just as you do in your paper filing system (for example, by topic), and file your e-mail in some logical way. Another tactic is to create e-mail addresses for specific types of records (for example, [Fiscal@agency.com](mailto:Fiscal@agency.com) or [Policy@agency.com](mailto:Policy@agency.com)) and send copies of appropriate e-mails to these addresses for retention. Such a procedure can be administered agency-wide and is less dependent on individual effort.

**4. File your e-mail regularly.** Review every e-mail as soon as you are finished reading it or responding to it and file it right away. Either place it in one of your e-mail folders or delete it according to a retention schedule.

**5. Pay particular attention to important e-mail.** Every record created or received in the course of state business is governed by a state retention schedule (and may not be destroyed except as provided by the schedule), but it is unrealistic to think that every state employee will pay close attention to every single email. Instead, pay particular attention to emails that are obviously important: policy decisions, legal advice, personnel issues, and other matters that have a broader public interest. Destroying these may create the impression of acting in bad faith.

“ *Companies have lost lawsuits by keeping too much information.... The opposite tack, deleting most messages, is also risky.\** ”

**6. Dispose of e-mail appropriately.** At the appropriate time, e-mail, like any other record, must either be (a) destroyed or (b) transferred to the state archives.

A. Deleting e-mail may not destroy it if, for example, backups have been made of the e-mail server and stored off-site. It is important to talk to your agency IT staff and verify that all copies of the e-mail have been destroyed at the proper time.

B. E-mail that is transferred to the state archives should be transferred in electronic form; the state archives will not accept paper printouts. An e-mail record is comprised of many parts, some hidden to the user, and all parts are necessary to preserve a record in its entirety. Consult the archives staff for information about transferring e-mail to the archives. The archives accepts only permanently-valuable records.

**7. Use your agency's RMA to manage e-mail.** If your agency has implemented a Records Management Application (RMA)—software that manages electronic records—you can use the RMA to manage your e-mail. Talk to your agency IT staff about whether an RMA is available for your use.