

VITAL RECORDS PROGRAM

SECTION 1. PURPOSE.

This Order defines the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) plan for the selection, protection, transmittal, and maintenance of vital records indispensable to emergency functions and describes responsibilities associated with the program. This is a full revision and update to the Order. Significant changes include a revised name for the Order to reflect NOAA's programmatic approach to vital records maintenance, the modification of policies and procedures to recognize the increased reliance on technology, and a better delineation of the responsibilities of individuals involved in maintaining and operating the program.

SECTION 2. SCOPE.

.01 The objective of the Vital Records Program is to support NOAA's continued operation in the event of emergencies.

.02 Vital records planning shall be based on a minimum 90-day emergency operating period.

.03 Only those records essential to the continuity and/or resumption of NOAA's mission-critical functions require special protection.

.04 Vital records must be evaluated on the basis of their essentiality in carrying out emergency operations or protecting the rights and interests of citizens and the U.S. Government. A document's designation as a permanent record has no bearing on its designation as a vital record. The records must be accessible and appropriate for use by authorized individuals.

SECTION 3. AUTHORITY.

.01 44 U.S.C. 3101. This statute requires that heads of agencies make and preserve records containing adequate and proper documentation of the agency's organization, functions, policies, procedures, decisions, and essential transactions, and to furnish information to protect the legal and financial rights of the U.S. Government and of persons directly affected by the agency's activities.

.02 36 CFR Part 1236 – Management of Vital Records. This regulation, issued by the National Archives and Records Administration, provides the framework for an agency's vital records program.

.03 Executive Order 12656, as amended. This Executive Order defines agency responsibilities during a national security emergency.

.04 Department Administrative Order (DAO) 210-2, Vital Records Program. This Order requires NOAA's establishment of a Vital Records Program.

SECTION 4. DEFINITIONS.

.01 Vital Records. Hard copy or electronic records necessary to maintain continuity of operations during an emergency to recover full operations following an emergency, and to protect the legal rights and interests of citizens and the U.S. Government. The two basic categories of vital records are emergency operating records, and legal and financial records.

.02 Emergency Operating Records. Records vital to the essential functions of the Federal Government for the duration of an emergency. Such records include emergency plans and directives, orders of succession, delegations of authority, staffing assignments, selected program records needed to continue the most critical agency operations, and related policy or procedural records. These records assist the Homeland Security Program Office in conducting operations during emergency conditions and resuming normal operations after the emergency. They must be available at relocation sites or readily accessible electronically.

.03 Legal and Financial Records. Records required for the preservation of the legal rights and interests of individual citizens and the Federal Government. These records require protection but need not be placed at or in the vicinity of relocation sites since the records would not be needed immediately. Designated and approved alternate site locations and/or Federal Records Centers may be used for dispersal storage. Examples of these records are those containing proof of ownership, financial interest (e.g., payroll, leave, social security, retirement, insurance), legal proceeding decisions, and research (e.g., data, programs).

SECTION 5. RESPONSIBILITIES.

.01 The NOAA Vital Records Officer has the following responsibilities:

- a. providing staff leadership, coordination, and oversight of the NOAA Vital Records Program;
- b. prescribing operating procedures;
- c. working with Vital Records Liaisons in identifying the vital records; and
- d. ensuring a select master set of federal, Department of Commerce, and NOAA directives, handbooks, forms, and other issuances, both administrative and technical, are available electronically at emergency operating facilities.

.02 Each NOAA Line and Staff Office is responsible for the implementation and operation of the Vital Records Program within its organizational area.

.03 Vital Records Liaisons are appointed by each organizational area and have the following responsibilities:

- a. assisting the Vital Records Officer in identifying new vital records and those records no longer considered vital;
- b. assisting the Vital Records Officer in determining the appropriate method of protecting their vital records;
- c. arranging for duplication of hard copy vital records for off-site storage;
- d. coordinating transfer of duplicated vital records to the appropriate off-site storage facility;
- e. maintaining an adequate supply of transmittal forms and box labels (NOAA Form 62-7) used for off-site storage of vital records;
- f. maintaining copies of completed transmittal forms and the Vital Records Inventory for the organizational area;
- g. facilitating the retrieval of vital records during an emergency or disaster;
- h. ensuring that vital records stored off-site are updated in accordance with the Vital Records Inventory schedule; and
- i. updating the Vital Records Inventory and submitting a yearly report of records stored off site.

SECTION 6. PROCEDURES.

.01 Each NOAA Line and Staff Office shall prepare a Vital Records Inventory (NOAA Form 66-22) for the organization. The Inventory includes: office of record; mission function; vital records description; location; off-site location; media; frequency of updates, time needed; contacts; volume; justification; and type of vital record. The Vital Records Liaison shall maintain the Inventory for the organizational area and shall forward a copy to the NOAA Vital Records Officer for central retention.

.02 Records indicated on the Vital Records Inventory shall be sent, as prescribed in the Inventory, to a designated site approved by the NOAA Vital Records Officer and the organization.

.03 Each Vital Record item identified for shipping on the Inventory shall be wrapped separately. A Vital Records Package Label, NOAA Form 62-7, must be affixed to each package.

.04 Records maintained at the designated sites shall be updated in accordance with the Inventory. Updated records shall replace existing records by exchanging on a one-for-one basis (i.e., container-for-container, reel-for-reel, etc.) unless indicated otherwise on the inventory.

.05 Vital Records Liaisons shall conduct an annual review of the status of their vital records. Liaisons shall then submit a report based on the results of their review to the NOAA Vital Records Officer.

.06 The NOAA Vital Records Officer shall review and consolidate the Vital Records Liaisons' reports into a single report showing compliance, partial compliance, or no compliance of each Line and Staff Office. The NOAA Vital Records Officer shall submit the consolidated report to the NOAA Homeland Security Program Office.

.07 The NOAA Homeland Security Program Office shall review and submit the annual status report to the NOAA Deputy Under Secretary and the NOAA Chief Information Officer.

SECTION 7. EFFECT ON OTHER ISSUANCES.

This Order supersedes NAO 210-2, Vital Records Plan, dated January 9, 1991.

Signed

Under Secretary of Commerce for
Oceans and Atmosphere

Office of Primary Interest:
Administrative Management and Executive Secretariat
Administrative Management Staff