

THE CONCEPT OF THE RECORD LIFE-CYCLE

A life-cycle is simply the stages through which an organism passes during the course of its lifetime. Pertaining to records, it consists of the various phases a record passes through from the time of its creation or receipt to the time of its final disposition.

As with any inanimate, man-made item, the life-cycle of records is not determined by natural laws, but by the needs of the individuals creating and using records.

RECORDS CREATION

The life-cycle of a record begins when it is created or received by an agency. A record is created whenever documentary information is placed onto a medium thus making intangible information into tangible records. This action takes place when forms are filled out, correspondence is written, reports are compiled and printed, information is recorded magnetically or electronically, etc.

The medium a record is produced on and the manner of creation does not significantly alter the concept of the life-cycle. All records are created, retained and disposed of on some cyclical basis.

RECORDS RETENTION

Records retention is the maintenance of documents for further use. Paper records are usually retained in office filing equipment while they are active. When activity; i.e., references to records; drops to a very low level they are considered inactive and may complete their retention in a records center.

Records centers are specifically designed to house inactive records far more economically and efficiently than in an office. Records centers are also more economical than microfilming for storage of any record with a retention of less than sixty years.

RECORDS DISPOSITION

Once a record no longer needed for an administrative, legal or fiscal reason, that record has reached the end of its useful life and it can be destroyed. If the record has historical value then that record needs to be preserved permanently.