

Records Custody: Training and Management Challenges and Accomplishments

The Records Management Division (RMD) faced a number of exceptional challenges this past year. In FY06, the Attorney General's office placed a legal hold on all records relevant to the Average Wholesale Price (AWP) litigation. This hold includes records from a number of state agencies, including Economic Security, AHCCCS, Corrections, Health Services, and the three state universities. As a result, a very large number of boxes at RMD could not be destroyed despite the fact that they had met the end of their retention period. In addition, the agencies began to transfer more records to the RMD. This meant more boxes to store with very little space to store them. Many of the records held for the AWP litigation have been released from legal hold, and the destruction of those records is proceeding according to the records retention schedules.

In February 2007, RMD received notice of another legal hold resulting from DRAM litigation. This hold affects all State agencies and political subdivisions with records documenting the purchases of electronic equipment with a certain type of computer chip since 1998. To alleviate the space crunch at the Records Center, the agency had to lease additional off-site warehouse space (TOSS III).

RMD warehouses use evaporative coolers that were installed when the building was constructed in the early 1980s. Numerous leaks have damaged boxes. While most boxes received little damage, a leak in March damaged approximately forty boxes that contained permanent records. RMD sent the records to professionals that specialized in the recovery of water damaged records for preservation treatment. Some damaged boxes contained records that were near their disposal date, so the agencies were notified and those boxes were destroyed. Since that time several of the coolers have been replaced, and the remaining coolers are in the process of being replaced.

The O'Neil database system, which is used to manage the boxes stored by RMD, was purchased and installed in February 2006. The data in the old ArDocs database system migrated into the new O'Neil system. A good deal of that data was faulty, and often it is not possible to identify faulty data until a problem surfaces. Staff have been cleaning up and correcting the data.

Also, problems with wireless scanners connectivity has reduced efficiency in the warehouses; plans are in place to improve that connectivity.

RMD staff continues to work hard to get the message out about public records laws and the responsibilities of the state agencies and political subdivisions. As a result, RMD staff have more requests for assistance and work. This year, RMD received 97 requests for imaging, which represents an increase of 57%. Requests to update or create Records Retention Schedules increased 6%. With no increase in the number of staff to review these requests, responding to those requests in a timely manner has been a challenge. RMD staff has revised the form to expedite approval of these requests.

RMD has accomplished a number of significant goals this year. The Records Retention and Disposition Schedules were reformatted to make them easier to understand and to reduce the work necessary to keep these forms up to date. The former schedule included both retention information (how long the records have to be kept) and disposition information (where the records are physically kept.) Because some state agencies do not send records to RMD for storage (and no political subdivisions store their records at RMD), information about disposition often confused these groups. To make the schedule simpler, the disposition information was removed and a new form was created for state agencies that transfer records to RMD. People that need to change how long they keep records in the office versus RMD can have those changes made immediately over the phone or with an e-mail request. This will decrease the number of schedules waiting for review and approval at RMD.

Recent legislation requires all cities and towns with websites to post meeting minutes to those websites within three working days. Since most municipalities want the posted minutes to include the signatures of board members, they are posting scanned copies of the minutes. Since municipalities must retain a paper or microfilm copy of the minutes, the scanned copy is only needed for access purposes. Statute requires approval of these imaging processes. In order to expedite approval, RMD developed a simplified approval form. This form can be used by any State agency or political subdivision that wishes to scan meeting minutes so that they can be posted on their website. Similarly, RMD has developed a simplified approval process for state agencies and political subdivisions that wish to scan records for access, but preserve the official copy in paper or microfilm. These new procedures will help eliminate some of the backlog of imaging requests.

State statute also requires that state agencies and political subdivisions must get approval to microfilm their records. RMD staff has revised the form to ensure that agencies provide all relevant information needed to make an informed decision to approve the request.

Much staff time is spent traveling around the state providing training to the smaller cities, counties, and other political subdivisions. In order to provide an alternative to the on-site training, Library and Archives purchased software that allows trainers to put their presentations on a website. The presentations can include PowerPoint slides, as well as video and sound demonstrations. Since the workshops are available on the web, employees of the political subdivisions don't have to wait for someone to schedule a workshop for their area and can view the training whenever it is convenient.