General Order

Houston Police Department

ISSUE DATE:	NO.
February 13, 2026	800-12

REFERENCE: Supersedes all prior conflicting Circulars and Directives, and General Order 800-12, dated December 3, 2020

SUBJECT: Records Retention

POLICY

Employees shall retain records in accordance with applicable laws and ordinances and the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC).

All City records are the property of the City of Houston and employees shall retain such records in accordance with this General Order and applicable City records control schedules. Employees are prohibited from unauthorized destruction, removal, or use of City records.

All employees shall remain mindful of any documents sent from or removed from their division and shall notify their supervisor if they have reason to question or doubt the appropriateness of the action.

This General Order applies to all employees.

DEFINITIONS

Administratively Valuable (AV). A record created for a business purpose that (1) has not been completed or (2) is needed for retention to conduct and/or support an operation.

Electronic Mail Record (Email). An electronic document, meeting the definition of a record, sent or received in the form of a message on an electronic mail system, including any attachments transmitted with the message.

Record. Any document that captures information created or received by the City government or any of its employees pursuant to law, including an ordinance, or in the transaction of official business. Including but not limited to any recorded information, or data file, whether physical, electronic, or digital, in any format or medium, regardless of physical form or whether access is open or restricted under state law.

The term does not include:

a. Extra identical copies of documents created only for convenience or reference.

b. Blank forms.

c. Notes, journals, or similar documents created by an employee for the employee's own convenience that do not, in whole or in part, conduct official business.

Records Control Schedule. A document that establishes mandatory retention periods for City records pursuant to section 2-119 of the City of Houston Code of Ordinances and the TSLAC, under the authority of chapter 441 of the Texas Government Code.

Transitory Information. Records of temporary usefulness that are not an integral part of a departmental records series, are not regularly filed within the department's recordkeeping system and are required only for a limited period to complete an action by an employee or to prepare an ongoing records series.

1 RESPONSIBILITIES

Employees shall treat all work-related materials as records, as the department, the City, and/or law may deem any information created or received in the course of duty to be a record. Employees shall retain "field notes" pursuant to General Order 200-08, **Conduct and Authority**. If an employee is unsure whether a document they created or received qualifies as a record, then the employee shall consult with the division records retention officer (DRRO) for clarification.

City Records Management Officer

The director of the City of Houston Administration and Regulatory Affairs (ARA) Department holds the position of City records management officer. The ARA Department provides records management training to Office of Planning and Data Governance (OPDG) records retention employees. OPDG is responsible for providing records management training to employees designated to serve as the DRRO and the alternate. The City records management officer or designee is responsible for citywide file management as well as the direction and control of the City's records disposition program.

Department Records Officer

The Deputy Director of OPDG holds the position of department records officer (DRO). The DRO shall maintain the department's records retention system in accordance with City ordinance and as directed by the ARA Department, Operations Division, Records Management Office. The DRO shall not destroy records without a *Request for Authority to Dispose of Records* form from the appropriate commander or the Chief of Police.

The DRO or designee shall coordinate with the City Records Management Office and each DRRO on tasks such as:

a. Compiling and storing records control schedules for every command and division within the department and ensuring they comply with regulations set out by the TSLAC in cooperation with the City Records Management Office.

b. Attending mandated training for the assignment and ensuring all DRROs are trained to perform their duties.

c. Assisting DRROs in the destruction of records according to the records control schedule, and other procedures.

d. Working with DRROs to ensure records control schedules are updated as necessary.

e. Working with the chiefs, commanders, and DRROs in submitting revised records control schedules to the City Records Management Office.

Chief of Police and Commanders

The Chief of Police and each commander shall appoint a DRRO and an alternate designee and submit those names to the DRO on an *Application for Records Management Web User ID* form and provide the DRO with updates whenever a DRRO is replaced. The DRO, at their discretion, shall approve the *Application for Records Management Web User ID* form and/or the *Harris County Department of Education (HCDE) Access Authorization Form*, prior to submittal to the ARA Department.

The Chief of Police and each commander shall ensure to:

a. Conduct a quarterly self-evaluation to ensure compliance with records control schedules and timely destruction of records in accordance with the records control schedules.

b. Provide a signed *Request for Authorization to Dispose of Records* form to the DRO if a destruction is warranted.

c. Review and update their command's or division's records control schedule annually or as needed and present any changes to the DRO via the chain of command.

d. Develop an annual records retention report and forward a copy to the DRO. This report shall be kept within the command or division files in accordance with its records control schedule and shall:

    1. Summarize quarterly evaluation findings.

    2. Summarize corrective measures taken, if any, in response to quarterly evaluation findings.

    3. List records destroyed in accordance with the records control schedule.

    4. List any updates to the records control schedule.

    5. Document command or division employee's completion of annual records retention training.

Division Records Retention Officers

DRROs shall have full access to all files in their command and shall:

a. Create a records control schedule with assistance from their commander, the DRO, and the City Records Management Office.

b. Obtain approval from the DRO prior to submitting any records to the HCDE for retention to ensure all required information has been entered into the COH web application.

c. Submit a list of records to the DRO that were indexed into the COH web application that corresponds to the number of "PC labels" requested from the DRO.

d. Ensure specific provisions are complied with and added to the records control schedule with assistance from the DRO or designee.

e. Destroy records according to the records control schedule with assistance from the DRO or designee.

2 RECORDS MANAGEMENT

Every command and division shall retain records according to that command's or division's records control schedule. Records common to all commands and divisions include but are not limited to:

a. Attendance records (e.g., Red Books, roll-call rosters).

b. Budget documents.

c. Overtime records.

The Chief of Police and each commander is responsible for the security and accuracy of their command's or division's attendance records and Red Books. Only authorized personnel shall have access to, and be allowed to make additions or corrections to, the command's and division's attendance records and Red Books.

Revision of Records Control Schedules

If a command or division determines its records control schedule should be revised, the DRRO shall contact the DRO. The DRRO shall provide the DRO with a revised copy of the modified records control schedule containing the changes with written approval from the commander. The DRRO shall forward approved requests to the DRO, who shall submit them to the City Records Management Office, which may adopt the records control schedule pursuant to City procedures.

When a City record has met the retention period, employees shall complete the formal destruction process and obtain written approval from the City Records Management Office prior to destruction, unless the document meets either of the following criteria:

a. A retention period on the schedule of less than or equal to one year.

b. The record is no longer administratively valuable.

Litigation and Open Records Requests

Employees shall not destroy a local government record that is the subject of litigation until the litigation is settled and closed.

Employees shall not destroy a local government record that is the subject of a request under Chapter 552 of the Texas Government Code until the request is resolved.

Email Use, Storage, and Retention

The department's computer system automatically backs up and saves any electronic mail records left on computers that are linked to the system, regardless of whether the email is left in the mailbox or the trash bin. The City's Houston Information Technology Services (HITS) determines

regular intervals to complete automatic backups. Pursuant to section 441.158 of the Texas Government Code, the TSLAC states the retention period for an email depends on the content.

Employees are reminded that if an email concerns a simple routine matter, such as an internal meeting notice or minutes of an internal staff meeting, the email is transitory information. Employees should delete such information once it is no longer administratively valuable because it is not required to be maintained by law.

It is the responsibility of the sending employee to retain, in either hard copy or electronic form, any email, in whole or in part, that meets the definition of a record, according to the records control schedule. If the email originates from a source outside the department, then it is the responsibility of the receiving employee to retain the record.

If an email is the only record of correspondence pertaining to a complaint, the recipient shall forward the email to Internal Affairs Division (IAD) and IAD shall maintain the complaint and correspondence according to the records control schedule and shall only destroy the record in accordance with the City's records management policy. If the email is printed and maintained as the official record, there is no need for IAD to keep an electronic copy.

If an employee receives a request for information (e.g., Texas Public Information request, subpoena) and the employee becomes aware of pending or possible litigation relating to records in custody, or there is an IAD investigation, the employee shall not delete those records, regardless of whether the retention period has expired.

An employee may delete an email of a purely personal nature because such emails are not considered official government documents. However, if a personal email is not deleted and it becomes the subject of an open records request or litigation, the employee shall not delete or edit the email, in whole or in part, until the open records request or litigation is resolved.

Special Note: If there are issues concerning the retention of emails, employees shall request assistance from the City's Houston Information Technology Services (HITS) or the City Records Management Office.

WARNING: Employees shall use discretion when sending emails of a personal or sensitive nature. All emails can be reviewed by a third party and messages are routinely screened at random.

The department realizes employees deal with sensitive issues constantly, and those sensitive issues must sometimes be transmitted to other employees. However, if an employee receives an unsolicited, questionable, or offensive email, the employee shall refer to General Order 300-11, **Discrimination, Harassment, and Other Prohibited Conduct**.

Microcomputer Files and Documents

The timetable to retain records is based on the content of the records and not the medium used for the storage of information. Therefore, employees shall maintain records stored electronically or digitally, whether on a hard disk, flash drive, network, cloud, or any other digital or electronic format, in accordance with the official records control schedule.

Scanning

Employees shall not scan original documents and store them in an electronic format as a substitute for maintaining the original hard copy. Employees shall maintain original copies in accordance with this General Order.

This subsection does not apply to those divisions and units that have in place a scanning process, set up by HITS and certified by the City Records Management Office to meet state electronic records standards, as long as no changes have been made to the certified scanner.

J. Noe Diaz, Jr.
Chief of Police