

E-Mail Quick Reference Guide

E-Mail Messages Are Records When...

- they are made or received by an agency under Federal law or in connection with public business; and
- they are preserved or are appropriate for preservation as evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the Government, or because of the information value of the data they contain.

Principal Categories of Materials to Be Preserved

- Records that document the formulation and execution of basic policies and decisions and the taking of necessary actions.
- Records that document important meetings.
- Records that facilitate action by agency officials and their successors.
- Records that make possible a proper scrutiny by the Congress or by duly authorized agencies of the Government.
- Records that protect the financial, legal, and other rights of the Government and of persons directly affected by the Government's actions.

E-Mail Messages That May Constitute Federal Records

- E-mail providing key substantive comments on a draft action memorandum, if the e-mail message adds to a proper understanding of the formulation or execution of Agency action.
- E-mail providing documentation of significant Agency decisions and commitments reached orally (person-to-person, by telecommunications, or in conference) and not otherwise documented in Agency files.
- E-mail conveying information of value on important Agency activities, if the e-mail message adds to a proper understanding of Agency operations and responsibilities.

Points to Remember about E-Mail

- Agency e-mail systems are for "official use" only by authorized personnel.
- Before deleting any e-mail message, the author should determine whether it meets the legal definition of a record and, if so, preserve a copy of the message.
- Printed messages kept as a record should contain essential transmission, receipt data, and attachments; if not, print the data or annotate the printed copy.
- Printed messages and essential transmission and receipt data should be filed with related files of the office.
- Delete messages that are not records when no longer needed.

- Delete messages that are records, after they have been placed in a recordkeeping system.
- When e-mail is retained as a record, the periods of its retention are governed by records retention schedules.