



Public Records Stored As Digital Images: Policy Statement

South Carolina Department of Archives and History
Archives and Records Management Division

Policy Statement

The South Carolina Department of Archives and History placed this policy into effect on 15 February 2024. It supersedes the policy placed into effect on 24 June 2005.

Purpose

This policy establishes the position of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History regarding the use of digital imaging technology for the maintenance of public records¹, as defined by Section 30-4-20 (C) of the *Code of Laws of South Carolina, 1976* as amended. The State Archives has recognized digital versions of public records as the official records through an approved ARM-13 form. Subsequently, the original paper records are regarded as convenience copies and are subject for disposal.

Authority

Sections 30-1-80 through 30-1-100 of the *Code of Laws of South Carolina, 1976*, as amended, provide the authority to establish this policy.

Scope

This policy statement applies to the records of all public bodies as defined by Section 30-1-10 of the *Code of Laws of South Carolina, 1976*, as amended.

Statement

This policy is established for the disposition of public records stored as digital images:

This policy does not supersede existing federal, state, or local laws and regulations that require maintaining public records and documents in a prescribed format.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure accessibility, reduce the risk of premature disposition of public records, and preserve public records based on their retention requirements.

¹ "Public record" includes all books, papers, maps, photographs, cards, tapes, recordings or other documentary materials regardless of physical form or characteristics prepared, owned, used in the possession of, or retained by a public body.

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Records with an established retention of less than ten years

State and local government officials can maintain public records that have an established retention² of less than ten years in a digital imaging records system. The original paper records can be disposed of after the imaged records have been examined for legibility and visibility and the authorization for the disposal of the original records has been approved by the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. The requisite form can be downloaded from the department's website: [ARM-13 Fillable Form](#). If the records are vital, a security copy should be stored off-site in a secure location.

Records with an established retention of ten years or more

State and local government officials can maintain public records with an established retention³ of ten years or more, including permanent records, in a digital imaging records system and dispose of the originals provided they:

1. Create appropriate indexes or other finding aids that will provide access to the information contained in the records.
2. Maintain security copies of the digital records and indexes stored in a secure off-site storage⁴. When identifying your off-site storage location in the ARM-13 form, the following information is required: name of vendor or storage area, location of vendor or storage area, and the address, telephone number, and other related contact information.
3. Plan for regular upgrades and system migration of imaged records. The State Archives *highly recommends*, migrating and converting both working and security copies of the digital records and indexes at least every ten years.
4. Sample both working and security copies of the digital records and indexes at least once a year to ensure that the data is still readable. Recopy immediately if loss of information is detected.
5. Verify that imaged records have been visually inspected and are legible and correct during initial digitization process.
6. Establish written policies and procedures to ensure a consistent digitization process that ensures compliance with the above criteria.
7. Obtain an authorization for disposal of original records in advance from the South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

² Retention Values must be established through approved records retention schedules developed in accordance with section 30-1-90 of the *Code of Laws of South Carolina*, 1976, as amended.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Secure off-site storage requires having a secondary storage location for a duplicate version of the digital records and indexes. For current guidelines and best practices, see the Digital Media Storage section of the Electronic Records Management Guidelines, available at <https://scdah.sc.gov/records-management/electronic-records/electronic-records-management-guidelines>

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Certification that the agency is meeting these criteria is acknowledged by completing of Part II of the corresponding Authorization for Disposal of Original Paper Records Stored as Digital Images (ARM-13) form. Those not able to ensure compliance with these criteria for the established retention period must retain a paper record or a microform that meets state standards.⁵

If the original medium for vital and permanent records is digital – for example with the procedural or transactional recording of deeds – SCDAH *highly recommends* the generation and retention of paper copies or microfilm that meet state standards.⁶ If paper or microfilm copies are not generated and retained for such records, state and local government officials *must* give the Archives written certification of their compliance with the criteria above before using the digital imaging records system.

Recommendations for the selection and use of digital imaging records systems

For current guidelines and best practices, see the Digital Imaging section of the *Electronic Records Management Guidelines*, available at <https://scdah.sc.gov/records-management/electronic-records/electronic-records-management-guidelines>

For questions and comments

South Carolina Department of Archives and History
Archives and Records Management Division
8301 Parklane Road
Columbia, SC 29223
Telephone 803.896.6100
Fax 803.896.6138

⁵ Microfilm should meet the state standards set out in “Quality Standards and Practices for the Microfilming of Public Records” (Regulations 12-200 through 12-203, Code of Laws of South Carolina, 1976, as amended).

⁶ Ibid.