



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 19 April 2024. It supersedes the policy placed into effect on 15 February 2024.

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 have recognized digital version of public records as the official records through an approved ARM-13. Subsequently, the original paper records are regarded as convenience copies and are subject for disposal.

In some cases, the original paper documents may be digitized, the original returned to the public and only a digitized version retained by the office. In these cases, the State Archives deems the digitized office version as the official record to be maintained for the required retention period. See Public Records Information Leaflet #29 for the requirements of born digital records.

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.

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.

Public Records Information Leaflet #13

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 requirement(s).

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 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.

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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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.
8. The digital versions of the public record(s) must adhere to their retention requirements as outlined in either the general records retention or agency specific records retention schedule(s). For record(s) deemed permanent, agencies must ensure that all requirements for managing these specific records are met.

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 the records is digital – for example with the procedural or transactional recording of deeds – SCDAH *highly recommends* the generation and retention of paper copies or microforms that meet state standards.⁶ If paper or microform 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>

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.

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For questions and comments

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