



Section 10 – Managing Records in Special Formats

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Main Things to Remember about Managing Records in Special Formats

- Records in special formats have particular requirements with respect to their maintenance, preservation and access.
- Keep special records cool, dry and in appropriate packaging to protect them from dust and magnetic fields.
- Follow the guidance in this section to ensure special format records remain accessible and available to UN staff and stakeholders for as long as required.

Introduction

This section covers the additional standards required to maintain records in special formats because of their physical properties. There are three checklists at the end of the section which can be used to ensure you have all the necessary procedures in place to effectively manage special records. Electronic records (i.e. records which consist of electronic data and maintained in digital format) are not included as records in special formats. This includes non-textual electronic records (e.g. digital sound or video recordings – .wmv, .mpeg, MP3 etc.).

Records in special formats have particular storage, handling and maintenance requirements. How they are organised (file plan) and how long they are retained



(retention schedules) are the same as any other records. Links to other records of the same business activity must be established and maintained.

Audiovisual Records

Audiovisual records come in many different formats, the main ones that you are likely to be responsible for are:

- magnetic tape (audio and video records) – both reel and cassette
- celluloid film
- photographic prints
- negatives (film and photograph)
- optical discs – compact discs and digital video discs (CD, CD-R, DVD etc.)

Audiovisual records are very susceptible to changes in temperature and humidity. Dirt and dust can cause great harm to this kind of media and it needs to be stored in a cooler and dryer environment than paper. Magnetic media is at risk from magnetic fields and forces. You should therefore store your audiovisual material in an area separate from your paper records.

Audiovisual material is fragile and even infrequent use causes deterioration. It is good practice to provide a copy of the original or master record for everyday use, including for use by external researchers. Ideally a third copy should be used to create future use copies so that the original can remain in a controlled environment (72° F/22° C or less, with a relative humidity between 30% and 40%) and is not subjected to more wear and tear. You also need to ensure that the master cannot be accidentally overwritten.

Management of audio visual records and archives is a specialised profession and guidance should be sought from these professionals to ensure the latest standards can be implemented.

Cartographic and Architectural Records

Paper-based cartographic and architectural records require special care because they are often oversized and thus easily damaged. They also are sometimes made of papers which are especially acidic or fragile. If you have these large-format records, you should store them flat whether they are loose or bound. Records which have been designated as archival should be enclosed or interleaved in acid-free coverings or sheets.

Field missions are now using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to create and manage cartographic records. Information Management Officers should



liaise with GIS experts on the management of all cartographic records. GIS experts will need guidance on managing GIS records to facilitate their transfer to HQ when the mission mandate ends.

Similarly, many engineering and architectural records are created and maintained in Computer Aided Design (CAD) systems. These systems may need to be transferred to HQ as archives. Consult with ARMS HQ for guidance on these issues.

Micrographic Records

Micrographic records often substitute (or act as a surrogate) for original records which are too fragile to withstand heavy use. Micrographic records are also used to save storage space – in which case the original will probably be destroyed. In this case the microform is the sole copy of the record and you should make sure you have a reproduction copy (printing negative) in addition to any reference copies and, most importantly, a master negative. This should be 35mm roll silver-gelatin film and must be stored in a controlled environment to ensure its preservation and only be used to make the printing negative and its replacements. If you are using microform as a surrogate for a record which you intend to keep, you should also adhere to this regime as you must avoid re-filming a fragile original.

Micrographic records require careful listing and labelling because there are potentially many records on each roll or fiche. If you have a microfilming programme, remember to carefully check the film to ensure records are clear and legible before destroying originals.



Checklist: Managing Audiovisual Records

- Are original and use copies of audiovisual records maintained separately?
- Are finding aids such as indexes, captions, lists of captions, data sheets, shot lists, continuities, review sheets, and catalogues (published or unpublished) maintained for all audiovisual records?
- Are cross-references to related textual records maintained with audiovisual records (classification plan and retention schedules)?
- Has the office instituted procedures to ensure that information on permanent or unscheduled magnetic sound or video media is not erased or overwritten?
- Does the office store permanent audiovisual records, particularly colour films and photographs, in storage which meet ARMS requirements?
- For special format records that are archives, has the records manager developed, where appropriate, a migration strategy from the original format to a more stable one?

Checklist: Managing Cartographic and Architectural Records

- Are maps and drawings stored flat in shallow-drawer map cases rather than folded or rolled?
- Are permanent maps and drawings stored in acid-free folders?
- Are large, heavy atlases and other bound volumes of maps or drawings stored flat, preferably on roller shelves to facilitate moving them without damage?
- Do adequate finding aids such as indexes exist for cartographic and architectural records?
- Are cross-references to closely related textual records maintained with cartographic and architectural records?



Checklist: Managing Micrographic Records

- Are records on microform arranged and indexed to permit ready retrieval of individual documents?
- Do microforms contain a title header or initial target page that identifies the records?
- Are boxes containing microforms individually labelled with the records series title and date span of the records, and are they sequentially numbered?
- Are permanent and temporary records filmed separately (to facilitate disposal)?
- Are silver gelatin and non-silver microforms filed separately?
- Are silver gelatin master microforms of permanent and unscheduled records inspected every 2 years while these records are in storage?

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What are Records in Special Formats?

Special records are records which are in formats other than traditional paper text files, e.g.:

- Electronic
- Audiovisual
- Cartographic
- Architectural
- Microform (film, fiche etc)