

Electronic Records Management: Appropriate Use of Portable Media (CDs, DVDs, Flash Drives)

Purpose: Provide guidance to state and local government agencies on the appropriate uses for portable media in the management of public records.

When considering how to manage public records using portable media (such as CDs, DVDs, flash drives, etc.), it is important to focus on the electronic records stored on the media and to treat the media itself as simply a container for the electronic records. In this respect, CDs, DVDs, and flash drives are similar to envelopes or boxes in the paper world.

Portable media is an appropriate *transport* container

Portable media is a convenient tool for transporting electronic records from one system to another, when they cannot be moved electronically.

Portable media is an appropriate *backup* container for disaster recovery purposes

Portable media is NOT an appropriate *storage* container

Portable media should not be used as a way of storing public records. There are two reasons for this:

1. Some portable media deteriorates. It has been well documented that CDs and DVDs can deteriorate and become unreadable over time, sometimes in as little as 18 months (commonly known as “CD rot”).
2. Portable media becomes obsolete. Today’s CDs, DVDs and flash drives are tomorrow’s 3½” and 5¼” floppy disks. If the agency does not have a drive that can read the media, how will it access or manage the records they contain?

Do not place portable media in paper files or folders and expect that your agency will be able to continue to access and retain the electronic records they hold for the duration of their required retention period.

Agencies that receive public records that are on portable media should move those electronic records (after appropriate virus scanning) onto a device more appropriate for the storage and continued maintenance of electronic records, such as the agency’s servers.

In this way the electronic records can be accessed, retained and managed throughout their minimum retention period, even if that is long after their temporary transport container has deteriorated or the drives to read the media exist only in museums.

**Additional advice regarding the management of public records is available from
Washington State Archives:**

**www.sos.wa.gov/archives
recordsmanagement@sos.wa.gov**