



## **Electronic Records Management: Sampling Analysis for Bulk Email Clean-Up**

**Purpose: Provide guidance to state and local government agencies on sampling for bulk email clean-up.**

Sampling is a good way to prepare for the bulk destruction of agency emails using the search and destroy approach. A sampling project will result in a retention profile of the email backlog which agencies can use to divide up the large backlog into more manageable chunks and create a list of keywords that can be used to isolate large groups of emails that have met retention without having to review each one individually.

**Identify scope and sample sets.** Create a sampling plan by first picking a time frame – a specific year works well. Then pick four, non-consecutive weeks to be the sample sets. Pull all sent and received emails from those weeks. If there are certain activities that are only done during a certain time of year, consider selecting sample weeks during those periods to make sure you're getting a complete profile of the email backlog.

**Review sample sets.** Someone familiar with agency business operations will review all emails within those weeks. For each email, identify the appropriate Disposition Authority Number (DAN) and retention. Emails can be sorted into folders by DAN and kept together to wait out their retention. Keep a list of the DAN's used, the number of emails that fall under each DAN, and the date range.

Note any specific phrases, subject lines, senders, recipients, etc. that you might use to search for and isolate similar emails using the search and destroy method. Take especially detailed notes for emails with long retention periods (6yrs+) to ensure that you will be able to identify and isolate long-term records so that the meat cleaver method can later be applied to any remaining unsorted emails.

**Document everything.** Many emails will have already met their retention and will be eligible for destruction but don't delete them just yet. The initial reviewer should document their findings on a destruction log or attestation form which they can submit to the agency's legal counsel, records manager, public records officer, or any combination of the three to perform quality control checks on the emails flagged for immediate destruction. Specifically, the QC checks should verify that emails have been assigned the correct DAN and that none of the emails slated for destruction are under a legal hold or subject to an open public records request.

**Going forward,** agencies can use this retention profile to understand more about how staff are using agency email. What departments are sending the most attachments? Could those documents be shared through a link instead? Are any departments using subject line codes that could be used to automatically sort emails as they come in? Create position or work unit file plans that staff can use to sort their own emails into retention buckets in real time, instead of waiting for the backlog to pile up again.



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

**[www.sos.wa.gov/archives](http://www.sos.wa.gov/archives)  
[recordsmanagement@sos.wa.gov](mailto:recordsmanagement@sos.wa.gov)**