



Disaster Preparedness: What Does an “Essential” Designation Mean?

Purpose: Provide guidance to state agencies and local government entities about the meaning of an “Essential” designation.

Essential records are records needed to respond to, and/or perform critical operations during/after a disaster or emergency. They need to be protected through backup or enhanced storage. (RCW 40.10.010)
(Washington State Archives Glossary)

Agencies need an appropriate backup of “Essential” records to use in case access to facilities or information systems are affected. Restoration of “Essential” records from backup should be prioritized after a disaster/emergency.

Common examples of “Essential” records include:

Type of Record	Reason
Disaster Response	Records needed to respond to a disaster/emergency (such as disaster preparedness plans, continuity of operations (COOP) plans, emergency contact lists, etc.).
Critical Functions	Records needed to operate the critical functions identified in the agency’s Business Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) during the disaster/emergency.
Financial and Contractual Obligations	Records needed to meet the agency’s financial, contractual, and other obligations during the disaster/emergency.
Payroll	Records needed to process payroll during the disaster/emergency.

Impact on Retention

Records retention is not affected by an “Essential” designation.

Once “Essential” records have been destroyed/transferred in accordance with the records retention schedules, they are no longer considered “Essential”. Any backup copies of the records should be destroyed.

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

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