

## FILE CLOSURE

Ideally, as has been noted, the removal of semi-current records from registries and office filing cabinets should be carried out regularly. Usually, this is done once per year as part of an annual file closure exercise. Initially, however, when semi-current records have been allowed to accumulate over a number of years, the public service organisation may have to begin with a 'clean up' review of all files in its several storage locations.

The managed closure of files begins with a review of the files in a registry or office. The person conducting the review should ensure that files are not too bulky, as bulky files are difficult to use. When files become unwieldy because of their thickness, retrieval of relevant information is problematic and documents contained in the file may be damaged. Files that have reached a certain thickness should be closed and a new volume or part opened. Typically, the maximum acceptable file thickness is one inch (3cm).

A new file volume or part should never be opened without careful consideration as to why the file has become so bulky, because bulkiness can be a signal that there is some deficiency in the filing system. A file may have become too thick because its subject area is too broad, in which case the file classification system should be adjusted to create more detailed subject categories. Or, the file may be too bulky because the chronological scope of the file is too long for the rate of document accumulation, in which case the date span of the file should be shortened (e.g. into chronological years).

Most importantly, the person conducting the review should ensure that files containing semi-current records are removed from current records storage equipment and areas. This is to be accomplished by establishing a cut-off time to the current life of all files in registries and office records storage areas so that they do not remain open indefinitely. The cut-off time triggering the closure of a file will differ according to the type of file.

For subject-based files, that is files that are established and organised according to their subject content, files may be closed either one year from the date of the last document on file or three years from the date on which the file was opened, whichever comes first. Regardless of the chosen time frame, file closure must be in keeping with the purpose for which the file was created and the operating environment in which the file is used. For example, it does not make sense to close a file one year from the date of the last document on file if the file relates to a conference held every second year, because the file creator can be expected to want

**APPENDIX G**  
**Inactive File Form**

**INACTIVE PART**

DATED FROM:

TO:

AFFIX TO TOP OF FILE

DO NOT ADD ANY MORE DOCUMENTS

FOR SUBSEQUENT CORRESPONDENCE SEE:

**INACTIVE PART**

to review the documents on file again in a year's time. Unless the person conducting the file review is very well-acquainted with the purposes and uses of a file, it is recommended that creators and users of files be consulted prior to establishing the cut-off time that will trigger file closure.

For particular instances or case files, that is files for which the subject or purpose is the same although each file deals with a specific person, institution, place, project or case, file closure should take place when all current administrative action to which the file relates has been completed. For example, personnel files should be closed upon termination of employment and emergency medical files may be closed upon treatment and release of the patient.

Closed files must be differentiated from active files to ensure that new documents are not mistakenly placed on them. Thus, an inactive file form should be placed on top of all other documents on a closed file. Also, the date of the first and last document on file should be recorded on the file jacket or cover. Finally, the word 'CLOSED' should be written in red ink diagonally across the file jacket or cover.

Although no new action may be taken on a closed file and no new documents added, some closed files may have continuing administrative value and should be kept available in or nearby the registry or originating office for a certain period so that action officers may refer to them. Such files may be removed from filing cabinets or other equipment designated for active files to cabinets, shelves or boxes in a storage area specially designated for closed files. The usual practice is to retain closed files in closed file storage areas for one year, assuming their rate of reference continues to fall off, at which time they should be dealt with in accordance with an approved records retention schedule and either transferred to a records centre, if they have an on-going retention requirement, or disposed of by destruction or transfer to Archives.

As, at some point in the future, action officers may need to refer to files which have been closed, it is important that the status and location of files be known at all times. Without such information it is impossible to retrieve all but the most current information or access the institutional memory needed for efficient and effective operations, public accountability and sound decision-making. Thus, a numerical index to all files, indicating their status and location, should be created and maintained, whether on loose-leaf sheets of paper, index cards or a computer.

The numerical index should indicate the file number, file title, file volume or part numbers, their outside dates, status (e.g. whether active or closed), and location (e.g. cabinet 1, storage area 3, etc.). It should indicate the unique number of the records retention schedule authorising the file's retention periods and final disposition, the disposal dates of the file's various volumes based on its approved

records retention schedule, and the file's recommended disposal action. Whenever action is taken on a file (e.g. closure and relocation), it should be noted on the numerical file index. For example, when a file is closed, the date of the last document on the file, the fact that the file has been closed, and its new location (e.g. closed file drawer, cabinet 1) should be recorded in the index to facilitate future retrieval. In addition, when the file has been closed because it has become too bulky and a new file volume or part has been opened in its place, the particulars of the new volume should be recorded in the index. The figure below shows a sample numerical file index.

<b>File #:</b>	HD/TDS/01	<b>File Title:</b>	Training of Staff	<b>Ret.Sch.#:</b>	97/7
<b>Vol. #</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Disp. Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	
1	1979-1986	Closed	01/94	Archives Accession # 95-2	
2	1987-1992	Closed	01/98	Records Centre (Accession # 93-1, Box 5, Location # 5-3-1)	
3	1993-1997	Closed	01/2004	Closed File Cabinet	
4	1997 -	Active		Active File Cabinet	

*Numerical File Control Index*