ISO 15489

Definitions of records management

In the past, 'records management' was sometimes used to refer only to the management of records which were no longer in everyday use but still needed to be kept - 'semi-current' or 'inactive' records, often stored in basements or offsite. More modern usage tends to refer to the entire 'lifecycle' of records - from the point of creation right through until their eventual disposal.

The ISO 15489: 2001 standard defines records management as "The field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records, including the processes for capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about business activities and transactions in the form of records".

The ISO defines records as "information created, received, and maintained as evidence and information by an organization or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business". The International Council on Archives (ICA) Committee on Electronic Records defines a record as "a recorded information produced or received in the initiation, conduct or completion of an institutional or individual activity and that comprises content, context and structure sufficient to provide evidence of the activity." The key word in these definitions is evidence. Put simply, a record can be defined as "evidence of an event"

Practicing records management

The practice of records management may involve:

- Planning the information needs of an organization
- Identifying information requiring capture
- Creating, approving, and enforcing policies and practices regarding records, including their organization and disposal
- Developing a records storage plan, which includes the short and long-term housing of physical records and digital information
- Identifying, classifying, and storing records
- Coordinating access to records internally and outside of the organization, balancing the requirements of business confidentiality, data privacy, and public access.
- Executing a retention policy on the disposal of records which are no longer required for operational reasons; according to organizational policies, statutory requirements, and other regulations this may involve either their destruction or permanent preservation in an archive.

Records management principles and automated records management systems aid in the capture, classification, and ongoing management of records throughout their lifecycle. Such a system may be paper based (such as index cards as used in a library), or may be a computer system, such as an electronic records management application.

ISO 15489:2001 states that records management includes:

- setting policies and standards;
- assigning responsibilities and authorities;
• establishing and promulgating procedures and guidelines;
• providing a range of services relating to the management and use of records;
• designing, implementing and administering specialized systems for managing records; and
• integrating records management into business systems and processes.