

AGENCY VITAL RECORDS PROGRAM

14 June 1983

Office of Information Services

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~DISASTER SUPPORT RECORDS

If the records in Agency offices are damaged in disasters such as fires, floods, plumbing breaks, or civil disturbances, or if access to offices is denied for an extended period, backup records are needed to sustain the following areas of Agency operation:

- a. General management, to carry out assigned missions and functions;
- b. Intelligence collection, analysis, and production;
- c. Financial obligations (money owed to and by the Agency, including payroll);
- d. Contractual obligations (services and products owed to the Agency);
- e. Employee entitlements (such as retirement and insurance benefits, awards due, etc.).

Records from appropriate categories should be selected for each Agency component. The selection should be complete enough to enable a person relatively new to a job to carry it out, but must be limited to a number that is practical to maintain and update on a continuing basis. The types and number of records vary according to component functions.

NATIONAL EMERGENCY RECORDS

The records selected for use during national emergencies should emphasize intelligence collection, analysis, command and control. They should be compact and readily transportable. They also should be easily and rapidly updatable.

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Not all Agency offices are directly involved in national emergency functions. Therefore, a separate collection of relocatable vital records should be set aside only from the holdings of participating components.

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STORAGE LOCATIONS

Agency vital records currently are stored in the Vital Records Depository at the Agency Archives and Records Center. This location is well-suited to provide disaster support records. It is distant enough to be isolated from local disasters, yet close enough for relatively convenient updating and use of the records.

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It is not adequate, however, for national emergency records. The Center is not hardened, and a nuclear attack in the Washington, DC, area probably would destroy this facility. Therefore, a more remote, hardened site is needed.

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Building and maintaining a new facility for national emergency vital records, however, would be an expensive project. The chances of budget approval might be improved if the facility served multiple functions or multiple agencies.

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Multi-functional use might include providing a backup computer processing capability for Headquarters. By using computer systems compatible with those in the Ruffing Center, this national emergency center could take over computer operations in case of hardware failure at Headquarters. To the extent this capability also could be used in peacetime for batch processing of routine jobs over high-capacity communications lines, some of the cost involved in building a new facility might be offset by a reduced need for Headquarters space.

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Multi-agency use would include sharing the facility (and its cost) with other Intelligence Community agencies.

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MEDIA AND EQUIPMENT

Vital records are drawn from operations throughout the Agency that use information in many different forms, including paper copies, microforms, and magnetic disks and tapes. In order to make use of non-paper records, specialized equipment is required and must be included in off-site storage and relocation plans. Alternatively, non-paper records may be converted to paper form.

Factors in considering conversion to paper include:

- a. Whether further processing is necessary to make use of the information in the records;
- b. Whether non-paper records are required for ease of update or transport;
- c. The cost of conversion versus equipment purchase and maintenance;
- d. The need to provide current software as well as hardware to process computer records;
- e. The availability and reliability of equipment and power sources under critical or extended emergency conditions.

At the present time, the Archives and Records Center does not have the capability to process or retrieve information from the magnetic tapes in the Vital Records Depository. Thus, although it provides safe storage for vital computer tapes, the Center cannot provide for their use if access to Headquarters computers is denied.

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If a new emergency facility is built and includes computer processing capability, it could be used for disaster support records as well as national emergency records. If a new facility is not provided, however, the Archives and Records Center would need to have equipment installed in order to provide full backup support for computer operations at Headquarters.

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There is also a need for the Center to have a separate archival storage system for electronic records. Currently, one of the most promising technological developments in this area is the optical storage disc. If effective, off-the-shelf optical data disc systems become available, they may also provide a capability to retrieve vital information under disaster or emergency conditions.

PRACTICE EXERCISES

Vital records cannot serve their intended purpose without established procedures and trained employees to use them. Currently, the Agency is deficient in both areas. The only way to test the adequacy of vital records and of the facility housing them is to use them under simulated emergency conditions.

The Agency in the past has held practice exercises using its vital records, but it has not done so for many years. Many private businesses run regular exercises and find them valuable not only for contingency purposes, but also because they provide an opportunity for employees and managers from different offices to better understand each other's roles and methods of operation.

REVITALIZING VITAL RECORDS

The Office of Information Services (OIS) is responsible for the Agency vital records program. It carries out this responsibility in conjunction with Directorate and component Records Management Officers. OIS provides central guidance and advice, but must rely on component officials to support vital records activities.

During the past year, the records management officers of most components have reviewed their vital record holdings to ensure they are current. The next step is to determine what additional records are required.

Like other Agency records, the Agency's vital record requirements must be established through development of component vital records schedules and their approval by the Agency Records Management Officer, OIS. These schedules identify the records, their form, and their frequency of deposit. Most of the existing vital records schedules have not been updated recently, and the schedules overall do not properly reflect current organizational structure. A necessary first step in revitalizing this program is to develop new schedules.

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Developing vital record requirements, however, requires extensive analysis and coordination. Identifying functions that must be sustained during disaster or emergency conditions and assigning personnel to carry out and practice these functions is necessarily a management responsibility in each Directorate. It requires that officers throughout the Agency expend considerable time and effort that otherwise could be devoted to important current activities. To be successful, therefore, a vital records program must have senior management support throughout the Agency.

In addition, the identification of vital records for national emergencies must relate directly to the emergency plans of the Agency and the Intelligence Community. This requires that the emergency plans include vital record requirements and that the personnel selecting the records be familiar with the plans.

OIS maintains contact with the National Intelligence Emergency Support Office (NIESO), Intelligence Community Staff, and intends to establish liaison with Agency emergency planning officials in the Planning Staff, Office of the Executive Director. This will enable it to coordinate Agency-wide requirements for vital records and an alternative storage site with Agency emergency planning.

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OIS need not wait until new emergency plans are developed, however, to begin improving the Agency's Vital Records Program. Disaster support requirements can be considered independently from emergency plans, although work done in each area will contribute to the other. In particular, backup records supporting Agency rights and obligations (financial, contractual, and employee) need to be maintained under all circumstances.

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To a great extent, Agency rights and obligations are supported by records of DDA Offices (and the Office of Personnel). Therefore, OIS plans to begin by reviewing vital record requirements with DDA components. This will include determining the extent to which backup records already are provided for by the dispersion of copies through Agency component and contractor files. It will also include updating DDA Vital Records Schedules and continuing our review of alternatives for handling various forms of records at the Archives and Records Center. Progress in the latter area will be supported by work planned in OIS's ADP Records Management Program.

To the extent emergency plans can be determined, national emergency records may be included as well. Once experience has been gained by revitalizing DDA vital record holdings, OIS can work with the other Directorates and the DCI Area on an individual basis to establish an overall program for the Agency. Even with senior management support and a priority assigned to the effort, the entire revitalization phase could take up to two years to complete. Once completed, the program could be maintained on a current basis through practice exercises and regular updating of vital records schedules.

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