

Methods of destruction

1. Introduction

Under Section 18(i) of the *Public Records Act 2005* (the Act), a “public record” or a local authority “protected record” cannot be destroyed without the authorisation of the Chief Archivist. If your organisation is a public office or a local authority, you must ensure you follow the appropriate guidelines and procedures when you destroy information and records.

2. Reasons for destruction

Information and records should be destroyed using the appropriate method and at the appropriate time. This is important because it:

- saves time and storage costs
- shifts focus and resources to higher priority information and records
- prevents unauthorised access to information and records
- may be a legislative requirement (such as to ensure privacy conditions are met).

3. Which information and records can be destroyed

You can only destroy public or protected information and records that the Chief Archivist has authorised for destruction.

For public offices, there are three types of disposal authorities:

- Organisation or function-specific disposal authorities
- ad-hoc or one-off disposal authorities created for specific information and records, and
- general disposal authorities, issued by us for information and records common to most public offices.

Please note that public offices must use our general disposal authorities. They do not need any further authorisation from the Chief Archivist.

For local authorities, the Association of Local Government Information Management (ALGIM) has an example retention and disposal schedule. The schedule is part of its Information Management Toolkit and shows information management staff at local authorities how to decide whether to retain or dispose of their non-current (or inactive) information and records. In addition, the List of Protected Records issued under section 40(1) of the Act identifies categories of information and records that the Chief Archivist has determined are “worthy of protection”. These information and records can only be destroyed with the approval of the Chief Archivist.

Local authorities can use our general disposal authorities for best practice information and records management, and these have been included in the ALGIM schedule.

3.1 When can information and records be destroyed?

Check with staff in your organisation whether any information and records eligible for destruction are still needed for ongoing business needs. You should also check whether these need to be retained for compliance reasons, for example, if they are:

- part of a request under the *Official Information Act 1982*
- part of a request under the *Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987*
- part of an appeal to the Ombudsman.

It is important to note that only the Chief Archivist can authorise the transfer or discharge to a third party of any information and records approved for destruction.

4. Ways to destroy information and records

Destruction in any form should be irreversible, secure and documented. You should take extra care when destroying sensitive information and records. Ensure that they are not retrievable or accessible by mistake or without authorisation. For physical information and records, burying or dumping is not a secure disposal method. Use the most appropriate destruction method that has the least adverse environmental impact. We recommend the destruction methods noted in the table below.

Media type	Recommended destruction method
Paper	<p>Shred documents that do not hold highly sensitive information.</p> <p>Burn or pulp documents that hold highly sensitive information.</p>
Digital	<p>Clear or overwrite non-secure digital information and records (including any metadata) to ensure no one can retrieve or read them. Do not just delete them, Deletion is not destruction. Deletion only removes the link to the information or record, rather than the information or record itself.</p> <p>Destroy sensitive digital information and records (including any metadata) to ensure no one can use the information or record , or the media on which it is held.</p>
Other media	<p>Cut, crush, shred or use chemical recycling appropriate to the type of media being destroyed. Examples of magnetic and optical audio-visual media are film, video, audiotape and microforms.</p>