

# An International Standard on Records Management: An Opportunity for Librarians

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The first International Standard on Records Management – *ISO 15489: 2001: Information and Documentation – Records Management* and the accompanying guidelines on how to use and implement the standard were officially launched at the Annual Conference of ARMA International in October 2001. These two publications are a collection of best practices in the field of records management and should be welcomed by all those who are responsible for records management and all those who create and keep records. This article traces first the origin of the standard. The standard, which is wide in scope, covers records management in all organisa-

tions, large or small, public or private. It applies to records in any format and on any media. It offers guidance on the design and implementation of records management systems and is a benchmark for best practices in the field. The article discusses the benefits of records management, the principles of records management programmes, what is involved in the design and implementation of a records system and as the longest part of the standard and the guidelines is the discussion of records management processes and controls, the article devotes similarly much space to the discussion of these topics.

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## Introduction

Librarians are well-trained in classification, indexing and the registration of the content of documents. These topics are fundamental to records management. Various library schools have, therefore, started to offer courses in records management as part of their programme. Records management is also offering librarians new job opportunities and placing an increasing demand for their skills.

The growing importance of records management has now been highlighted by a new international standard on the subject which was launched at the annual conference of the international association of records managers, ARMA International. The conference was held in Montreal, Canada, on October 3, 2001. The conference hosted the launch of the new international records management standard, *ISO 15489*, which is now an accepted international standard.

Such a standard, which can truly be described as a landmark in the history of records management, does not appear on the scene fully created in one instance as did Athena when jumping out of the head of Zeus. The standard is the culmination of a long development in the history of records management.

This article covers the origin and the construction of the standard. Secondly, the extensive scope of the standard is explained. The standard covers all aspects of records management and it is applicable to all records of organisations without regard to form. Thirdly, the article discusses the benefits which can be derived from records management. Although the standard mentions many benefits, a few are added to that list. The principles of records management programmes are discussed, then the design and implementation of a records system, and finally, records management processes and controls are evaluated. This article ties together directives from the stand-

ard and the topical discussion in the guidelines which is a technical report which accompanies the standard. The article is a critical evaluation of the standard based on many years of experience in records management.

### *The origin*

The origin of the standard can be traced back to the year 1996, but on February 5 1996, the Australians published the first standard on records management (AS 4390.1 - AS 4390.6 - 1996 1996). The Australian standard was written for Australia, but it immediately received international attention. ARMA International for example proclaimed in 1997 that "AS 4390 is technically sound and provides a good foundation on which to build a record management program" (Carlisle 1997). This was the reaction of ARMA International to the ideas put forward by the Australian Standards authority to make AS 4390 into an international standard. The International Standards Organisation (ISO) assumed the leadership and in the spring of 1997, ISO's Technical Committee 46 (TC 46) put it to the vote of the member countries whether to adopt the Australian Standard unchanged as the international standard. That was, however, not the conclusion and the decision became to write a new standard based on the Australian version (Gunnlaugsdottir 1997). TC 46 deals with information and documentation matters. The discussions in the TC 46, soon revealed that writing a standard covering the principles of records management with guidance on how to attain the goals of best practice in the field was no easy task. That task was, however, given to SC 11, that is the 11<sup>th</sup> subcommittee of TC 46 which deals with archives and records management. This work was carried out under the chairmanship of David Moldrich who is also of the Standards Australia AS 4390 authoring committee (Steemson 2001b).

It soon became apparent that there was not universal agreement on all the concepts. New Zealand, for example, does not embrace the Australians' concept of the records "continuum" (Kennedy & Schauder 1998, 10-11) which assumes that a record remains active until it is destroyed, as opposed to the "life-cycle" concept which differentiates between active and stored documents. It was, therefore, at the subcommittee's meeting

in May 1999 that the work was split into two parts, and two ad hoc groups were formed, one to create a "high level" standard and the other to write the technical report that is the guidelines which accompany the standard (Steemson 2001b). At the committee meeting in Berlin the year after, in May 2000, a draft standard was distributed. The number of versions were, however, greater. In total, 317 documents were reviewed and comments were received from committees from over eighty countries in order to finalise the new standard which is of 7.800 words on 26 A4 size pages. The guidelines on the other hand are a longer document, 46 pages, which provides a more detailed discussion and explanations of the various issues in the standard. All this work has taken five years since the publication of the Australian standard, but it was unquestionably necessary "to ensure a firm foundation of international co-operation and understanding" (Bower 2001).

### *The scope*

The standard covers records management in all organisations, large or small, public or private. It applies to records in any format and on any media. The standard provides guidance on the responsibility of organisations for records and records policies, procedures, systems and processes and it supports quality management for certification under the *ISO 9000* quality management (ISO 9001:2000 2000) and *ISO 14000* environmental standards (ISO 14001:1996 1996). The standard provides guidance on the design and implementation records management system, but it does not cover the management of archival records in archival institutions. Last but not least, the standard is a benchmark on best practises which all those involved with records should adopt, managers of organisations, records managers and all those who create and keep records.

The standard 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". A document, on the other hand, is "recorded information or object which can be treated as a unit". Finally, records management is the "field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition

of records, including processes for capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about business activities and transactions in the form of records” (ISO 15489-1:2001 2001, 3).

Records have three distinctive characteristics as explained in section 7.2 of the standard. They have *content* which must be linked to the meta-data which are necessary to document the other two characteristics, that is the *structure* (the format and relationship between the elements comprising the record) and the *context* in which the record was created, receive or used, that is when and by whom and under which circumstances, and what links there are to other documents making up the total record. In short, a record must reflect accurately the message, the decision or what was done. It must support the needs of the organisation of which it is a part and be of use to determine who is accountable for the transaction which is being described (ISO 15489-1:2001 2001, 7).

Nowadays, when electronic record-keeping systems are prevalent and a document and its meta-data are often physically separated from one another, it is all the more important to secure that things are done right. Now, more than ever, we need to secure that records are:

- *authentic*, that is not forged and truly created or sent by the person purported to have created or sent them and at the given time. Organisations need to introduce records management policies and procedures to provide the necessary control on the creation, receipt, transmission, maintenance and disposition of records to ensure that records creators are identified and have the needed authorisation. Furthermore, organisations need to protect records against additions, deletions, alterations, uses and concealment which is unauthorised.
- *reliable*, that is their content can be trusted as a full and accurate account of the transaction, activity or facts to which they attest and can be depended upon. To fulfil this, records must be created at the time of the event or soon afterwards and by individuals who have direct knowledge of the transaction or incident.
- *integral or whole*, that is complete and unaltered. It is necessary to protect records against unauthorised alterations, and those authorised must be explicitly indicated and traceable.
- *useable or useful*, that is capable of being used and in order to be used, the record needs to be located, retrieved, presented and interpreted. The connection to the business activity or transaction which produced it should be clear. To retrieve electronic records can become almost impossible if they are not stored on the

computer in a systematic manner. It should also be mentioned that it may prove a problem to keep together e-mails and their attachments (ISO 15489-1:2001 2001, 7).

The standard is divided into eleven chapters or sections which are:

1. *Scope* which outlines the coverage of the standard.
2. *Normative references* which are among others the *ISO 9000* quality management standards and the *ISO 14000* environmental standards.
3. *Terms and definitions* which defines the major records management concepts, including those mentioned here earlier. For further reference the reader can consult another standard, *ISO 5127* (ISO 5127:2001 2001).
4. *Benefits of records management*. This chapter discusses thirteen of the greatest benefits which can be derived from a good records management system.
5. *Regulatory environment* covers the laws, regulations, work rules, codes of ethics and standards which apply to the organisation and to records management.
6. *Policy and responsibility* emphasises that the aim of a records management policy should be that the organisation creates and manages authentic, reliable and useful records which support the activities of the organisation as long as they are needed. It must be identified who is responsible for records management in the organisation, but all employees must also keep accurate and complete records of their activities.
7. *Records management requirement* covers the basic principles of records management programmes in section 7.1, and in section 7.2 the characteristic of a record which was discussed here above.
8. *Design and implementation of a records system* covers that subject matter in a detailed way.
9. *Records management processes and controls* is the longest and most detailed chapter in the standard. It covers on six pages the many issues in the creation, use and storage of a record during its life cycle.
10. *Monitoring and auditing* discusses briefly that compliance monitoring should be regularly undertaken to ensure that organisation policies and requirements are being met. This should be documented and reports should be maintained.
11. Finally, *training*, is a necessary part of the records management programme.

Accompanying the standard, that is Part 1: General, is Part 2: Guidelines which were written to explain the many ways, work rules and procedures which are good practice under the standard. When the standard says “thou shalt” the guidelines provide guidance on how to reach the

goal. The guidelines also contain two annexes which are of great assistance to the reader. Annex A enumerates the sections of the standard and connects them to the appropriate section in the guidelines where further explanations can be found. Annex B, on the other hand, ties the sections in the guidelines to those in the standards.

This division into the standard and the guidelines is quite appropriate. Each country has its traditions and ways of doing things. The goal can be universal, but we travel different roads to reach it. I mentioned earlier the difference of opinion regarding the “records continuum” and the “life cycle” concept in New Zealand and Australia. Some countries are not custom to use retention and disposition programmes (Conelly 2001) which we use in Iceland and in many countries. Due to these differences, the conclusion was to have the aims of sound records management in one part, the standard, and the guidelines on how to reach these goals in another.

### *The benefits of records management*

Definite benefits can be derived from records management. Chapter four of the standard, states thirteen direct benefits to be gained from records management. It is emphasised that a well designed records management programme will produce various economic benefits for any organisation. To the list we can also add the fourteenth benefit which is the saving of valuable office space and reduction of off-site storage cost because records are being stored in a more efficient way and redundant and outdated records are being destroyed when no longer needed. Such savings can add up to large amounts.

A well designed and executed records management programme will facilitate:

- *To manage the organisation* in an efficient and accountable way. Records are also proof of business actions and preserve historical accounts for posterity.
- *To manage risk* by insuring that the organisation can survive despite events of disaster. Records security and emergency planning is an important part in records management. This should not be underestimated in these uncertain times when organisations which are very unlikely to suffer natural disasters are all of a sudden caught in calamities engineered by humans. Investigations in the USA show that 90% of companies “go out of business if they suffer a serious loss of data

in their computer centres and do not have any emergency plan and back-up” (Njalsson 2001). A new standard on information security management covers this field in detail (ISO/IEC 17799:2000 2000).

- *An initiative in quality and environmental management.* Good records management is necessary if organisations are to fulfil the demands of the *ISO 9000* quality standards and *ISO 14000* environmental standards. Research in Iceland and abroad shows that problems in records management is the main reason why organisations fail to attain certification. Problems in this field emerge again during regular reviews when the auditor comes looking. The standard is therefore a welcomed help in meeting these requirements.
- *Protection of interests.* Records can provide support and protection in litigation directed against the organisation, and can show that the organisation has followed the appropriate rules and acted in a responsible manner. A retention and disposition plan, written in accordance with the appropriate laws and regulations and the needs of the organisation can also prove beneficial if an organisation is to be proven guilty by summoning its own records. Good records management has frequently been of great help when the interests of the organisation, its employees or its customers have to be defended in the press or in a court of law.
- *To meet demands made by law.* Records which meet the requirements of the standard are proof that the organisation abides by the law and meets regulatory requirements and codes of conduct. Good records management facilitates audit and oversight activities.
- *To meet the wishes of customers and needs of employees.* Records management makes it easier for an organisation to provide a good service in a consistent and equitable manner. Such a place of work is also more likely to offer employees an interesting job and a pleasant work environment. Such organisations should also be able to offer better remuneration for a job well done as the energy of the workforce is devoted to constructive things like offering a good service instead of searching for records and putting out forest fires (ISO 15489-1:2001 2001, 4).

It is obvious from the above that records management has many benefits which should lead organisations to become interested in record management programmes and thereby in the *ISO 15489* standard. Records are an important asset in any business, although perhaps the assets which far too many managers neglect to protect. On a closer look, however, few organisations can attain their goals and service their customers without records. It is, therefore, appropriate that the British Standards Institute will be publishing three short publications directed at senior management covering why managers should be interested in

the standard, what they can expect if they implement it and how they can measure the benefits derived from its use (McLean 2001).

### *Principles of records management programmes*

Section 7.1 of chapter seven of the standard covers the main principles of records management programmes. Records are created, received and used in all economic activity. In order to support the pursuit of this activity, organisations create records which should be authentic, reliable and useful, and need to protect the integrity of these records as long as they are needed to pursue business interests, hold employees accountable for their actions, preserve its history for posterity or to comply with the regulatory environment. In order to do this, organisations need a comprehensive records management programme.

In such a programme certain principles must be observed. For the first thing, it must be determined which records should be created and what information they must contain. Secondly, the form and structure of created and captured records must be determined and what technologies will be used for that purpose. What metadata need to be created and linked to these records must be decided. The requirements for retrieving, using and transmitting records between different users must be determined and for how long records must be kept to satisfy that need.

It is important to organise the records collection in such a way that records management is facilitated and records made accessible, without permitting unauthorised access. Records must also be kept in a safe and secure environment, but should only be retained as long as they are required by the organisation or have to be retained by law. The risk of not being able to retrieve authoritative records regarding events or transactions must be assessed. Here risk avoidance, that is continuity planning comes into play, and contingency measures should be taken to insure that records which are vital to the organisation are protected and can be recovered in the event of disaster. Back-up of computer software kept off site is an example of such measures. The useful life of records is, however, variable and records should only be preserved as long as they are useful or required by law. Historical records are on

the other hand kept indefinitely as dictated by their nature.

Finally, I should mention the main principle which the standard borrows from quality management. Even if the organisation possesses a satisfactory records management programme, processes can always be improved. It is, therefore, important to identify opportunities for improvement resulting in greater effectiveness and efficiency of processes and procedures (ISO 15489-1:2001 2001, 6).

### *Design and implementation of a records system*

The standard mentions in section 8.2 five characteristics of a good records system:

- *Reliability.* The system needs to capture routinely all records which are part of it, and organise them in accordance with the nature of the business, protect them from unauthorised changes or disposition and be a primary source of information about the documented transactions. The records need to be accessible and tied to their metadata.
- *Integrity.* To insure that the records are not destroyed, altered, removed or accessed by unauthorised parties controls such as access monitoring, user verification, authorised destruction and security has to be implemented.
- *Compliance.* The system should be managed in accordance with the expectations of the organisation and the community which it is a part and comply with their needs and regulations.
- *Comprehensive.* The system should cover the total organisation which it serves.
- *Systematic.* Record should be created, maintained and managed systematically. In order to do so, a documented policy is needed, spelling out methods and detailing who carries responsibility for the different functions (ISO 15489-1:2001 2001, 8-9).

These demands which the standard makes on a records system are in full accordance with my experience as a consultant on records management for more than 15 years. The work rules and procedures on designing and implementing a records system which can be found in section 8.4 of the standard, and the guidelines on methodology which accompany them in sections 3.2.2 to 3.2.9 in the guidelines is also a work process which is familiar:

The first step is *preliminary investigation*. During this step information is gathered to gain an under-

standing of the administrative, legal, business and social context in which the organisation exists to discern those factors which influence its need to create and maintain records. The next step is an analysis of the *economic activity* which the organisation pursues. The standard uses, however, the more narrow term *business activity* which it then defines to embrace not only commercial activity, but also public administration, non-profit organisations and other activities. Those working in the organisation often tend to believe that their operation is quite unique and special, but experience shows that the main functions in all economic activity are for all practical purposes more or less the same, even if the service provided or the product sold is quite different. This difference is, however, sufficient to warrant making different demands on records management in a timber yard versus a firm producing pharmaceuticals.

The first two steps lead to the third, the *identification of requirements for records*. The nature of the economic activity and various outside demands dictated by the social environment produces different needs for an organisation to create, receive and maintain records. One organisation must follow laws specifying required procedures and practice in public administration when dealing with various client cases or coming to decisions. Another organisation must take special care to safeguard records covering information which is personal in nature. Laws on accounting and taxation make special records requirements on business firms and so on.

The identification of requirements usually turns up four documents:

- A listing of the various sources producing records pertaining to the organisation.
- Another listing of the various demands made on records management in the organisation by itself, the legislature or society in general.
- A risk analysis of the importance of records for the organisation.
- A formal report to management on the needs of the organisation to maintain records.

The fourth step, although it may not necessarily be taken in this order, is the *assessment of existing systems*. Most organisations have some sort of a records management system. During this step the

records management requirements are compared to the existing system. The analysis shows where improvements are needed and leads directly to the fifth step, the *identification of strategies for satisfying records requirements*. What is needed most often is a uniform file classification system based on subject matter. In writing such a plan a good analysis during the first two steps is of great help. We need to ask which records should be maintained, where, how, for how long and in the custody of whom? What we often find out is that the equipment used to store records is insufficient, the storage of records in computer systems is not systematic, and no retention and disposition schedule is available. The organisation is therefore keeping more records and longer than needed, and often without being able to retrieve them. Records security and contingency planning is also frequently lacking.

The *design of a records system* is the sixth step. It is no easy task as we can see by reading the guidelines. Section 3.2.7 in the guidelines identifies 13 reports and plans which may be produced during this step. The most complicated work and the most time consuming is to design a uniform file classification plan for the organisation. This section is very brief on the subject, the two words "*file plan*" are just mentioned in the listing of the reports and plans, but section 4.2.2.2 devotes more space to the development of a business activity classification scheme (ISO/TR 15489-2:2001, 9).

Good project planning is necessary to ensure the seventh step, the *implementation of a records system*. Many organisations fail on this test. Nothing happens of itself. The system must be put into use and the work force must be trained on how to work in the system and how to use it to the greatest advantage. If that is not done, a lot of work and valuable time has been wasted.

Finally, there is the often neglected eighth step, the *post-implementation review*. Those organisations which have been most successful in their records management have not ignored this review. What is involved is to measure the performance of the records system, assess where improvements are needed and take the necessary corrective action. All systems can be improved. Continuous improvement should be introduced by monitoring the system in use, and through interviewing management and staff and by conducting surveys,

performance improvements can be discovered (ISO 15489-1:2001 2001, 10-11; ISO/TR 15489-2:2001 2001, 3-7).

### *Records management processes and controls*

In chapter nine which is the longest chapter of the standard (6 pages), and in chapter four of the guidelines (15 pages), the main work processes and controls in records management are discussed. When we study these sections of the standard, Annex A in the guidelines proves very useful as it directs the reader to further explanations to be found in the guidelines.

The most important records management tools are:

- A uniform file classification plan which is written with the nature and functions of the organisation in mind.
- A retention and disposition schedule which determines for how long records are to be kept, how they shall be stored, and when and how they shall be disposed of.
- An access and security plan which covers who will have access to specified records, how the records collection shall be maintained and what records fall under contingency planning and must be copied for security reasons and the copy kept offsite.
- A thesaurus or an index is also often composed in order to facilitate the selection of the subject for records.

The subject classification in the file plan is descriptive of the activities and functions of the organisation, but does not take notice of the names of divisions or fields within it. The subject classification is functional. It contains several levels which move from the general to the specific, but the refinement or number of sub-classes is determined by what is useful in each case. It is important to use unambiguous terms and discrete groupings in order for there to be little doubt where to file records. The classification plan is written in consultation with those who create the records and it should be regularly updated to reflect changes in the functions of the organisation.

The subject classification is supposed to insure that records which belong together are filed in the same place in the plan. Records relating to the same case or subject are all filed in the same subject folder. The classification facilitates also to allocate different access codes to records by staff

and have security measures for records differ by subject. Employee records should, for example, not be open to all and production recipes may be trade secrets where only a limited few have access, an example being the Coca-Cola formula.

The usefulness and preservation value of records varies. The classification makes it easy to decide on different retention periods for records or the retention can be permanent in some cases. In order to file records, their subject must be determined and a subject name chosen for classification. Guidance on the choice of subject names can be found in a standard from 1985 (ISO 5963: 1985 1985). An index makes it easier for the user to find records on a particular subject in the system and to decide where to file certain records.

In the guidelines there is an example from a classification system. The example is a numeric system with infinite possibilities for extension. It provides, unfortunately, only a limited insight into what is the most difficult and time consuming task of introducing a records system, that is writing a uniform file classification plan (ISO/TR 15489-2:2001 2001, 9). Textbooks on records management are also not any great help in this pursuit. *Information and Records Management* offers, however, some valuable additional information on the subject (Robeck et. al. 1996, 98-130).

In order to write a retention and disposition schedule one must first decide which records are to be captured into the system, but the retention period is determined by the needs of the organisation as well as external demands. Organisations need to maintain records of decisions, transactions, agreements and actions as long as it serves a business purpose, but records should be eliminated in an authorised, systematic manner when no longer needed. Notice must be taken of legal requirements when retention periods are chosen, but some records do also have permanent value. These are, for example, records of historic value and other records of continuous value, like agreements, contracts and evidence of actions and policies.

A security and access policy contains formal rules on who is to have access to specified records and under what circumstances. It also involves that records are to be maintained in such a manner that their usefulness, reliability and authenticity is secured as long as they are needed. Storage conditions and handling of records must

ensure that records do not get lost, and are protected from unauthorised access, destruction, theft or natural disaster. Electronic records need special care and attention to be accessible in case of system change and must be migrated to the new system. Records can easily become not accessible due to changes in computer software and hardware if that is not done.

A thesaurus is more than a simple index of terms. It is a systematic list of words and concepts which are linked together in a systematic way according to relationships, connections, hierarchy, classes or levels. Rules on how to construct a thesaurus can be found in still another standard, *ISO 2788* (ISO 2788:1986 1986). A thesaurus is great help in constructing a classification scheme and in allocating classification terms to records.

Chapter nine of the standard also covers the main work processes in records management, and chapter four of the guidelines provides a more detailed coverage.

#### *Records capture*

This is the process of deciding which records are to be made and kept. This decision covers also received records. It is not necessary to maintain records which do not demand any action by the organisation, document no obligation nor responsibility and hold the organisation in no way accountable. Part of the capture process is also to capture the metadata associated with the record so that the record maintains its context, content and structure. The importance of these factors has become more obvious with the growing number of electronic records which are not meaningful if this is lacking.

Various electronic records, and often constantly changing, can be found in public domains like on the *Internet*. *ISO 690-2* covers how we refer to such records (ISO 690-2:1997 1997) but the standard covers how we can ensure the reliability of these records, what Web page information should be maintained, and how we can prove what was on the Web at each particular time (Steemson 2001a).

The purpose of capturing records into a records system is not only to connect the author to the record and put it into context, but also to connect it to other records relating to the same

subject matter. The methods used are subject classification and subject registration which make it possible to link records by subject matter, determine access to records by subject and decide time of disposition, if appropriate.

#### *Registration*

Registration offers proof that a record has been created and or captured into the records system. The register into which records are registered is a separate record. It contains the following meta-data: date, time of registration, subject, title or an abbreviated description, name of author, sender or recipient, and a unique identifier, like a number which is given to the record when it is registered. If the organisation has a classification scheme for records, the record is classified and the classification registered as well.

The importance of registration has increased with the growing number of computer based records management software. By using such software it is very easy to monitor the status of errands, who is acting upon them, when must an answer be ready and so on.

#### *Storage*

The standard lays down some main rules on the storing of records. It is, however, not as detailed on this subject as the Australian standard which devotes one part of six to the subject, including very practical guidelines (AS 4390.6 - 1996 1996). Records should be stored on media which ensure their usefulness, reliability, authenticity and preservation for as long as they are needed. Storage conditions should be such that records are protected against unauthorised access, theft and untimely destruction by man or nature. Special storage consideration are for electronic records, like maintaining off site back-up in order not to lose the copy with the original, and hardware and software obsolescence should be kept in mind.

The guidelines mention several factors which are important when selecting storage and handling options and equipment. These factors are the volume and growth rate of records, their use, security and sensitivity needs, physical characteristics, retrieval requirements, access needs and the relative cost of records storage (ISO/TR

15489-2: 2001 2001, 18). Records often waste valuable office space when stored in binders on shelves instead of in lateral files, and they should be packed and sent to a lower cost off site storage when no longer in active use. Active records should, however, be stored where they are centrally accessible to those who have authorised access. Never should records be stored where they can be destroyed due to water leakage, unstable heat, fire or vermin.

#### *Use and tracking.*

It is necessary to be able to locate records which are in use, what is their status and who is acting upon them. Not all employees have access to all records. It is, therefore important to identify the access and security status of different records. Access by outside parties is sometimes permitted by law but the access is nevertheless regulated. Privacy protection measures in many countries require that access to such records be restricted and the use of such records must be recorded. Computerised records management systems register such use automatically. These systems make it also easier to track records and determine their place and status and who is acting on them. It is easy to discern what action is needed on a particular record and when. When many persons have access to records in a paper form, it is necessary to use some sort of lending cards which can be placed in file folders to show who is using that record and when it was taken from the file. The storing of lending cards in the file can also serve as proof of who has been using the record, but then the responsibility for the central file has to rest with one person which authorises and registers the lending of records.

#### *Implementing disposition*

Only historic documents and records vital to the organisation are preserved permanently. Other records are all disposed of sooner or later. Destruction of records should, however, always be authorised. The year of disposition is usually placed on files of accounting records when they are taken out of active use based on business and legal requirements.

The storage time of records is thus dependent upon their nature and their value to the organisa-

tion. Disposition is determined from that fact. Records which may have a bearing on an actual or pending lawsuit may never be disposed of. Records destruction should also always be performed in such a way that the confidentiality of those records is preserved. The "frantic two-week effort to destroy "thousands" of e-mail messages and documents" related to the audit of Enron Corp. directed by David B. Duncan, the lead partner on the Enron account at Arthur Andersen, then the fifth largest accounting firm in the USA, has led to more than his job dismissal. On May 6, 2002 Andersen went to trial on charges of federal obstruction of justice and the odds are that the firm may end up in bankruptcy court (Weber 2002a, 2002b). And on the topic of destruction, it is, for example, not always sufficient to use the "delete" command to erase computer records. Such records have been known to come to live again (ISO 15489-1:2001 2001, 11-17; ISO/TR 15489-2:2001 2001, 7-21).

#### *Conclusion*

Records management has come a long way to attain its present status. The publication of the *ISO 15489* standard in October 2001 is the highlight of a long journey. A wealth of experience has been gathered in the standard and the guidelines and it is a good example of best practices.

The standard covers records in any form. It covers also all aspects of records management, but not archival records within archival institutions. The standard puts forward a standardised but unconditional way to manage the flow of records during an age of information. It is also a help in making records a reliable and authentic account of what actually happened for the benefit of posterity. Organisations can have an eternal live. It is, therefore, important that records preserve their history in tact, are available in case of legal disputes, fulfil the requirements of laws and regulations, but last but not least, are readily available to facilitate our daily work in servicing our customers.

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*Editorial history:*

*Paper received 13 February 2002;*

*Final version received 19 June 2002;*

*Accepted 26 June 2002.*