

Records Management Training for Ames Laboratory Employees

Records management training is required by the Department of Energy (DOE) for all federal personnel, including contractor employees, as appropriate for their job responsibilities (DOE O 243.1A). The purpose of this training is to provide information on how to identify records and how to handle them at the Ames Laboratory.

What is “records management” and why do we need it?

Records management is the “*field of management responsible for the systematic control of the creation, maintenance, use and disposition of records*” (44 U.S.C. 2901). More simply stated, records management is making sure that records are organized where they can be located and referenced efficiently, are updated and protected as necessary, and are stored and disposed of properly.

There are benefits to having an efficient approach to records management. A good records management program:

- Ensures the information needed for decision making and operations is readily available;
- Protects the rights of the agency, its employees, and its customers;
- Provides continuity in the event of a disaster;
- Protects records from inappropriate and unauthorized access;
- Provides protection and support in litigation;
- Improves office efficiency and productivity;
- Supports and documents historical and other research;
- Facilitates effective performance of activities throughout an agency.

What is considered a “record”?

The term “record” can be quite vague. Knowing how to identify a record must therefore be the first step in managing records. The National Archives and Records Administration’s definition states that records are

“any books, papers, maps, photos, machine readable materials, or other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received by an agency of the United States Government under Federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business and preserved or appropriate for preservation by that agency or its legitimate successor as evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the Government or because of the informational value of data in them.” (44 U.S.C. 3301)

In terms related to business at the Ames Laboratory, a record is anything that contains information regarding the conduction or facilitation of Laboratory business. The most common types of records that Ames Laboratory employees are responsible for include:

- Email communications,
- Program-specific records,
- Documents tracked by the Laboratory's Document Control Program
- Laboratory research notebooks, theses, and published articles.

These records are essential to produce desired results, reduce costs, protect employees, and retain information to ensure the continued success of the Laboratory.

How do I handle my records?

Email communications

Emails that contain any information regarding how, why, where and what business is being carried out by employees of the Laboratory must be retained and organized in a manner which makes retrieval possible and efficient. All Laboratory employees should create a folder (or multiple folders) within their email client for storing any email they determine to be a record. Email records must be stored on the server and not on an individual desktop. Email servers are backed up daily which will serve as sufficient protection until an electronic records management system (ERMS) is available. In response to DOE O 243.1 (revised in FY 2012), the Laboratory will adopt and implement a Laboratory-wide ERMS by the end of FY 2015. This includes a system to maintain email records.

Program-specific records

Examples of this type of record include purchase orders from Purchasing, invoice vouchers from Accounting, official personnel files from Human Resources, employee medical records from Occupational Medicine, etc. When the time comes to move files into storage, whether it is the end of a fiscal year, when employment is terminated, or when the files become inactive, there are a few things that must be done:

- Box up the records
 - Contact the Training, Documents & Records (TDR) Office to obtain banker's boxes for storing files.
- Provide department and index information for the records
 - On one of the short ends of the box, write your department name on the top line.
 - On the next line, write the appropriate series. TDR staff can provide you with a list of existing series for your department, and also create a new series when necessary.
 - When applicable, also write the fiscal year on the box.
 - Provide TDR staff with any other indexes you'd like applied to the records.
- Contact the TDR Office to pick up your boxes.

Documents with Lab-wide impact

The original version of any plan, policy, procedure, manual or other document with Laboratory-wide impact must be maintained by the author. The author must follow the procedures laid out in the Document Control Program Plan. The approval record and official approved versions of documents are maintained by the TDR Office.

Laboratory research notebooks, theses, and published works

Laboratory notebooks are available for purchase from the Ames Laboratory Storeroom in Spedding Hall. Once a notebook has been assigned to an employee, it is their responsibility to maintain it in compliance with the Laboratory Notebook and Research Documentation Procedure. Participation in Laboratory Notebook and Research Documentation Training (AL-219) is strongly encouraged for all researchers. The Guidelines for Preparing and Maintaining a Research Notebook are also provided inside the front cover of each notebook. This document provides valuable information on Ames Laboratory policies and best practices regarding research documentation.

When preparing to leave the Ames Laboratory, or a laboratory notebook is complete, it must be turned in to the TDR Office. In the event that you are leaving the Laboratory, TDR staff must receive all of your laboratory notebooks before your check-out sheet will be signed. TDR staff will scan the laboratory notebooks and save PDF records to Content Management. At this point, the laboratory notebook can be checked out to an active employee through the TDR Office or stored in the Records Holding Area.

All Ames Laboratory Information

Any information created as part of a job duty is Laboratory information and potentially a Laboratory record. Employees must not dispose of or transfer Laboratory information to another institution without consulting the TDR Office.

Questions

If you have any questions regarding Records Management, the TDR Office is available to provide assistance. Contact us at (515) 2944-9972 or training@ameslab.gov.