



National Archives News

The Newsletter of the Archives and Records Management Unit

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Observing Records May Day



This is what happens when records are not protected

RECORDS MAY DAY

The Virgin Islands territory joins USA colleagues in observing Records May Day on May 1st with an open house at the Archives and Records Unit and other activities aimed at encouraging people to protect important records in their possession.

Records May Day, first observed by archivists in the Americas, is being recommended for international recognition, as the day devoted to caring for and protecting valuable records.

Members of the public are invited to visit the Archives and Records Management Unit in the Burhym Building on Wickhams Cay I on Thursday, May 1st, between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Visitors will be able to see a video on records management and will receive one complimentary acid-free box in which to store fragile records.

Acid-free boxes protect records from exposure to light and air which cause paper to breakdown. Paper becomes brown, brittle and crumbly when it comes in contact with the damaging agents in light and air. Records stored in acid-free boxes can last for hundreds of years. Tune in to local radio during the day and hear the Deputy Governor's Records May Day Message and records preservation tips.

For more information about the VI Archives and Records Management Unit, please visit the Deputy Governor's Office website at www.dgo.gov.vg.

Simple things to do on Records May Day

- ✓ Call the Archives Unit on the Day and tell us the name and telephone number (work and home) of the contact person in case of an emergency in your office.
- ✓ Read up the Records Emergency Plan
- ✓ Ensure that officers know how to use the Fire Extinguisher
- ✓ Designate a person to ensure that the Fire Extinguisher is working
- ✓ Call the ARM Unit to discuss any RM problem
- ✓ Move boxes of files off the floor in your storeroom.



Preserve Virgin Islands Memory

-Tips-

1. *Do not display your favourite items/records in direct sunlight. It will illuminate them beautifully but will also cause significant fading or colour change. Displaying artwork and other artefacts out of direct sunlight will help retain their rich colours.*
2. *Keep enemies of archives at bay at all times*
3. *Store photographs and paper documents in that part of your home/office with the least fluctuations in temperature and humidity.*
4. *A stable environment should be between 55° F and 70° F degrees*
5. *Relative humidity should be at a fixed point, between 45% and 60%. 50% is preferred.*
6. *Consider making duplicate copies of valuable photographs, video tapes and delicate records*
7. *Store records in good quality enclosures. This can minimize damage from environmental fluctuations, dust and light.*
8. *Use pencil to label photographs, videotapes and other records with dates, places and names of the people for the benefit of future generations.*
9. *Do not use ink. It can run and ruin the document*
10. *Although there are not many professional conservators in the Virgin Islands consider getting advice before attempting to repair a damaged family heirloom. Contact your local art gallery, museum or archives, who could refer you to names of conservators nearest your area.*

Conversation with a Conservator

Confessions

A member of the public confessed to a Conservator that she had kept some certificates and documents from the 1800's in an old suitcase. Is this the best way to keep these documents? she asked.

The Conservator replied: "Acid-free protection is very desirable; also keep the documents in the dark if possible. Don't frame them and put them on your wall - keep them in that suitcase! Strong light of any sort (sunlight, camera flashes, scanner illumination) will very gradually bleach the inks and may also help to turn the paper brittle.

Old Paper Was Better

Paper made from the late 19th century onwards eventually gets very brittle and brown when exposed to light, due to its high acid content caused by chemical bleaching during a new manufacturing method - you can easily see this in books of the period, where the outer quarter-inch or so of each page has turned brown and will crumble into dust if you try to bend it, whilst the centre of each page (where the light couldn't penetrate when the book sat closed on a bookshelf) remains relatively undamaged.

Old Rags Better Still

Earlier paper that has a high content of rag (yes, old rags!) and little or no wood pulp will probably keep in better condition. Vellum and parchment should last even better, if looked after. Don't forget that you're preserving the document for posterity, not just for the next few decades. Rough handling might well not produce any noticeable harm to the document now, or even in our lifetime, but in a hundred years or two it could be a very different story. Ideally, the docs also need to be kept at a modest room temperature and at normal humidity levels, but more important is that the temperature and humidity levels stay constant and don't fluctuate...

Hold Your Breath

Don't forget that handling docs transmits small amounts of warmth, perspiration and breath onto them; this will have adverse effects over time.

I personally would make a digital copy of an old document, as long as it's not in terrible condition, as from the point of view of preserving the document (i.e. the historical information in it), having a copy that can be studied and reproduced at any time without concern will obviously reduce wear on the original." (To be continued next issue)

Records Day Quiz

1. What is the title of the most recent ARMU publication?
2. How many specific concerns are recorded in the 'Emergency Plan for Records' (EPFR) re the CAB Basement as a records storage?
3. Define 'Vital Records' in one sentence.
4. What is a Records Centre (in one sentence?)
5. At what temperature should records be stored? At what 'relative humidity'?
6. According to the EPFR, how many Departments have rented off-site storage space?
7. All e-mail messages should either be saved forever or deleted after a few months (True or False)?
8. All records are archives (True or False)?
9. The best legal defense is to keep all records forever. (True or False)?
10. The Virgin Islands Government has a state-of-the-art information policy in place. (True or False)?
Answers on last page. Be honest. Do not look before you have answered all questions.

Industry News

Preserving Electronic Records

According to the latest report released by the Digital Preservation Coalition (DPC), Portable Document Format (PDF) is one of the best file formats to preserve electronic documents and ensure their survival for the future. This announcement will allow information officers to follow a standardised approach for preserving electronic documents.

Information management and long-term preservation are major issues facing consumers and businesses in the 21st Century. This report is one of a series where The Digital Preservation Coalition (DPC) aims to think about and address the challenges facing us.

The report reviews PDF and the newly introduced PDF/Archive (PDF/A) format as a potential solution to the problem of long-term digital preservation. It suggests adopting PDF/A for archiving electronic documents' as the standard will help preservation and retrieval in the future.

It concludes that it can only be done when combined with a comprehensive records management programme and formally established records procedures.

Betsy Fanning, author of the report and director of standards at AIIM, comments, "A standardised approach to preserving electronic documents would be a welcome development for organisations. Without this we could be walking blindly into a digital black hole."

The National Archives works closely with the DPC with issues surrounding digital preservation and will continue to do so. Adrian Brown, head of digital preservation at The National Archives said: "This report highlights the challenges we all face in a digital age. Using PDF/A as a standard will help information

officers ensure that key business data survives. But it should never be viewed as the Holy Grail. It is merely a tool in the armoury of a well thought out records management policy. "

The report is a call to action, organisations need to act now and look hard at their information policies and procedures to anticipate the demand for their content (documents and records) in the future. Everybody has different criteria, types and uses for documentation so you need to find one that works for your organisation.

If you would like to read the full report please go to the Digital Preservation Coalition website. This can be accessed at: www.dpconline.org/graphics/reports/index.html#twr0802

The Digital Preservation Coalition (DPC) is a cross-sector member organisation established in 2001 to foster joint action to address the urgent challenges of securing the preservation of digital resources in the UK and to work with others internationally

Answers to Quiz

- (1) Records Management Procedures Manual for the Virgin Islands Public Service
- (2) Six.
- (3) Vital records are those records essential for the continued operation of government, business or organization in the event of catastrophic loss
- (4) An interim store of inactive files, from 5-15 or 25 yrs, managed for administrative use and archival review.
- (5) 68° F; Relative humidity at 55° F.
- (6) Seven.
- (7) (False) Some email messages contain business- related information and should be kept based on their content. Like paper records, e-mails should be assigned appropriate retention schedules.
- (8) (False). Some records could be disposed of shortly after creation in routine operational procedures or after a short period as specified in the Retention Schedules.
- (9). (False). Records are retained because of their content but not all content is useful forever. By hanging on to all your records forever, you not only escalate costs associated with records management, but it is challenging to locate what you need when you need it most.
- (10) (False). There is no written information policy in place

If you answered 8-10 questions correctly. Congratulations! You have the beginnings for grasping the basic concept of RIM, which when applied could help reduce Government risk and increase its ability to compete.

If you answered 5-7 questions correctly, you need to learn more about RIM. Make an effort now .

If you answered less than 5 questions correctly, you could be putting Government at risk financially and legally. Seek to remedy the situation. Attend all RM Workshops and Classes