17 March 2025

Tēnā koe

**Official Information Act request**

Thank you for your email of 17 February 2025, requesting the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry)'s policy for archiving emails, including our policy for how long we save old emails before they are deleted, if they are deleted.

I have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Please find my decision on your request set out below.

The Ministry has a technical solution in place that automatically moves emails to an online archive within Microsoft Exchange after two years.

We do not automatically dispose of emails from individual staff members' mailboxes. Our policy (supported by training material) requires that staff identify any information of value, including emails, and file them into the appropriate record-keeping systems. Once this is done, staff members may dispose of the emails as they are considered duplicates of low or no value.

Attached please find **Appendix: Ministry of Social Development internal policy on storing information.**
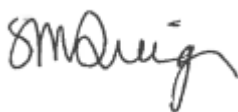
For shared mailboxes, where business workflows have been established to capture information elsewhere, automatic disposal may be in place, with retention periods set based on the specific processes involved. In cases where such workflows are not in place, shared mailboxes are treated in the same manner as individual mailboxes.

I will be publishing this decision letter, with your personal details deleted, on the Ministry's website in due course.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with my decision on your request, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi nui

pp.

Anna Graham
**General Manager**
**Ministerial and Executive Services**

**APPENDIX: Ministry of Social Development internal policy on storing information**

## Know where to save and store your information, documents, files and records.

On this Page:

We create and maintain records of business information to meet transparency, accountability, Official Information Act (OIA) and other legislative obligations. This means we're all required to keep and store the information we create as a record in the appropriate repository (e.g., Objective, TRIM) as it is created. This ensures no information is lost by being inappropriately destroyed, removed, or altered.

## Why is storing information important?

MSD is a Kaitiaki (guardian) of information. Information that we create or receive as part of our business activities are public records regardless of their format and are treated as taonga (treasure). To ensure information is accessible, usable, and managed securely we need to save it to the relevant business system. Everyone is responsible for doing this. The benefits of storing information in the right location and in the appropriate system include:

- Making information easily discoverable and accessible, so it can be reused in the future;
- Ensuring that information is quickly available to authorised staff; and
- Enabling the secure management of information through its lifecycle.

## What to consider when storing information

You must only store information in approved MSD information systems, such as Objective or line-of-business systems (e.g., CMS). Avoid keeping information in locations that cannot be accessed by others, such as desktops, hard drives, email inbox or folders, or personal drives. At MSD, access to information must be open by design to authorised staff and restricted by exception. This means that information is accessible to all MSD staff and is restricted only where there are legitimate reasons to do so (e.g., personal information).

When deciding where to store information, it is important to consider the following:

- The purpose and type of information being stored (e.g., corporate, personnel, client);
- The intended purpose of each system, including who needs access to it; and
- Your team's practices.

It is important to understand which systems and locations your business unit uses to store different types of information, so that you can follow the agreed practices and easily find information in the future.

## Why do we need to retain information?

To make sure information is accessible, usable, and managed securely we're all required to keep and store information in the appropriate and approved information repository or line of business system. This allows us to maintain records of business information to meet transparency, accountability, and legislative obligations.

## What information needs to be stored?

We should save information we receive, create, and maintain that relates to our work on behalf of MSD as this provides evidence of our business activities and decisions. This applies to all information regardless of its format.

Some examples are:

- Decision papers and supporting materials;
- Policy briefings and recommendations;
- Reports, memos and meeting minutes;
- Important email and other correspondence; and
- Information we create for and relating to our clients.

## What information does not need to be kept?

While we are all responsible for creating and maintaining full and accurate information, it is equally important that we dispose of information when we are legally able to do so. Digital information is considered the authoritative source and we should avoid keeping paper copies of digital records. Digital information is considered the authoritative source and we should avoid keeping paper copies of digital records. See the Digitisation Standard for information on digitising physical records. All physical information that we still need to keep must be managed in accordance with MSD guidelines. For more information on managing physical information, see Managing Physical Records.
If you are unsure whether information needs to be kept, see Disposing of Information for further details about what information should be kept or disposed of, or contact the Information Operations team via infohelp@msd.govt.nz
Digitisation Standard (PDF 204.07KB)

## Where should I be storing information?

It is important to understand where you should save different types of information. For most corporate information, Objective is our main information repository. This includes storing emails we send and receive that record actions or decisions. Outlook is not a recordkeeping repository and doesn't allow us to search, share, or retrieve MSD information that's in email format or to meet our legal obligations. For more guidance around what emails need to be saved in Objective, please refer to our Saving Information guide.