



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY  
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20350-1000

SECNAVINST 5210.15A  
NAVDAC-14  
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SECNAV INSTRUCTION 5210.15A

From: Secretary of the Navy

Subj: VITAL RECORDS PROGRAM

Ref: (a) 36 C.F.R. Part 1236 (1985)  
(b) DOD Directive 3020.26 of 24 Oct 85 (NOTAL)

(R)

Encl: (1) Vital Records Program Guidelines

(A)

1. Purpose. To implement the provisions of reference (a) by providing policy and assigning responsibilities for the protection of vital records.

2. Cancellation. SECNAVINST 5210.15 and OPNAVINST 5210.18.

3. Scope. Vital records consist of emergency operating records and rights and interests records, in any form, maintained at alternative sites (emergency relocation sites and Federal Records Centers) to ensure Department of the Navy's (DON's) capability of performing minimum essential missions and functions in national emergencies, and to assist in reconstitution of DON once the emergency situation has stabilized.

4. Policy. The Navy and Marine Corps will actively protect those records vital to the continuity of naval operations through adherence to all applicable regulatory standards.

5. Objectives. The objectives of the DON Vital Records Program are to:

a. Create and maintain current duplicative records at alternate sites adequate to support emergency actions and functions of DON per references (a) and (b).

b. Standardize alternate files material selection, labeling, and storage procedures.

c. Provide for the preservation of rights and interests records of individual citizens and the Government.

d. Encourage the use of data processing methods to ease the accounting, inventory review, and retrieval of alternate files material.

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6. Responsibilities

a. The Secretary of the Navy will be responsible for the Vital Records Program policy.

b. The Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Marine Corps will be responsible for the implementation of the vital records program.

A) 7. Action. Addressees will:

a. Maintain a Vital Records Program following enclosure (1).

b. Ensure that command records managers maintain a role in the development and implementation of the Vital Records Program.



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## VITAL RECORDS PROGRAM GUIDELINES

1. Introduction. The Department of the Navy (DON) must be able to accomplish essential operations without interruption under all emergency conditions. Accordingly, activities will:

a. Maintain records essential to the performance of functions during and immediately following a national emergency at emergency relocation sites or designated alternate headquarters, from which DON operations may continue.

b. Safeguard records essential to the reestablishment of DON operations following a national emergency to the maximum extent possible to survive anticipated national emergencies.

## 2. Definitions

a. Vital Records. Records essential for maintaining the continuity of DON activities during and following a national emergency. The vital records program includes two basic categories: emergency operating records and rights and interests records.

b. Emergency Operating Records. Copies of documents and automatic data processing (ADP) software which would be required to carry out essential functions of the Navy for the duration of the emergency and post emergency conditions. Included are essential directives, instructions, programs, plans, emergency action procedures and readiness records, as well as substantive and procedural records basic to the implementation of emergency operations. They are the records that would be needed immediately; therefore, copies should be deposited at the alternate headquarters or alternate sites. A system must be established to ensure emergency operating records are current. Documents should be in paper form so they can be used without reliance on mechanical equipment.

c. Rights and Interests Records. Those records which are required for the preservation of the rights and interests of individual citizens and DON. Because they would not be needed immediately, such records need not be kept at alternate headquarters or in paper form. Rights and interests records are those containing information on proof of ownership, citizenship, financial interests, and legal proceedings and decisions.

3. Vital Records Selection. Alternate files material selection and maintenance is a five-step process.

a. Step 1. Realignment of DON functions from a peacetime activity to wartime emergency requirements.

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b. Step 2. Preparation of emergency action statements concerning identified functions, and initial selection of supporting alternate files material.

c. Step 3. Review of plans and final selection of material.

d. Step 4. Periodic review of material.

e. Step 5. Replacement, addition, or deletion of material.

4. Identifying Vital Records. Consider the following three types of functions in identifying the vital records of a command:

a. Mission-Oriented Functions. Make a comprehensive list of normal command functions. Identify the categories of records relating to each of these functions. Determine which functions are necessary during a national emergency. After those functions are identified, earmark specific vital records identified for safeguarding.

b. Emergency-Oriented Functions. Treat all emergency functions assigned to the command in the same manner as those outlined in paragraph 4a.

c. Emergency Plan of Operations. Analyze normal tasks and procedures to determine alternatives to be followed in an emergency. Develop a projected plan of operations to assure continuation of essential functions. Documentation of the operational plan will produce vital records material requiring proper safeguards.

5. Categories of Vital Records

a. General Management Records. These include statements of mission in an emergency; plans and programs for carrying out that mission; delegations of authority and of succession to command; organization and manning documents, predrafted regulations or announcements to be issued immediately at the beginning of an emergency; action programs that may have been drafted in skeleton form; information concerning the whereabouts of vital records; information about Navy personnel, property, and activities sufficient to provide a basis for damage assessments; and similar information on essential emergency functions. Include copies of basic regulations and procedures.

b. Lists of Key Personnel. Lists of employees assigned emergency duties, as well as lists of employees' skills that might be useful during and following an emergency, frequently are designated as vital records.

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c. Legal Rights Records. In general, a distinction is drawn between records that support legal rights (rights that may be reestablished through affidavits and are well-known to those involved) and records of legal rights maintained by the commands when DON is the statutory office of record. Real estate titles, for example, are a type of legal rights record that should not be considered a vital record because affidavits and other records that survive an emergency should be sufficient to establish title. However, if DON is the statutory office of record for legal rights, it has the primary responsibility for records protection. Similarly, few people know the amount of their equity in Federal retirement funds; therefore, the necessary records to protect this equity must be safeguarded. Most DON commands and agencies also have taken steps to protect the rights of their employees to earned leave and pay by safeguarding copies of payroll and leave records.

d. Fiscal records. Commands should safeguard copies of periodic summaries of financial status, records of significant amounts of money owed to DON, and records of debts owed by DON. Generally, no effort should be made to safeguard procurement records; the vendor usually preserves what might be needed to prove a claim.

e. Industrial Records. Safeguard engineering drawings, explanation of complex industrial processes, lists of suppliers for items and materials not readily available, and similar records.

f. Assigned Mission Records. If the emergency mission is a continuation of a normal program, safeguard copies of those records that show the current status of the program.

6. Labeling Vital Records. Mark and number each item in a uniform manner so it can be easily identified by responsible personnel. Properly mark classified records.

#### 7. Storing Vital Records

a. The alternate site should provide adequate protection for the records during the first few days of an emergency in case of radioactive fallout.

b. Certain classified documents may require special space or equipment that must be approved by the command security manager before storage of records begins.

c. Maintenance of the vital records is more dependent on the care taken in labeling and shipping them than on the space and equipment.

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8. Vital Records Storage at National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). NARA provides for the storage, protection and servicing of rights and interests records. The facilities of all Federal Records Centers, regardless of geographic location, are available for agencies desiring to store such records. In addition to storage space for paper records, each NARA records center has environmentally controlled space suitable for the storage of vital records on magnetic tape and photographic film. Activities may make arrangements for the transfer of their rights and interests records to any of the records centers by contacting the appropriate center, or the Office of Federal Records Centers (NC), National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC 20408.

9. Maintaining an Effective Program. Review the vital records program at least annually. Valuable information for improving the program can be obtained by testing it under simulated emergency conditions. Such tests are also useful for instilling the participants with an understanding of the meaning and importance of preparedness.