Texas Government Code §441.180(7) defines a vital state record as any state record necessary to:

- the resumption or continuation of state agency operations in an emergency or disaster
- the re-creation of the legal and financial status of the agency
- the protection and fulfillment of obligations to the people of the state.

How Can I determine if a Record is Vital?

In the event of a disaster, what records are absolutely necessary to resume operations? Also, consider the following requirements for records that would justify their designation as vital:

- Operational requirements - the needs of the operation, continuation of the department’s mission.
- Legal requirements - the need to provide proof of authority or activity.
- Governmental requirements - state and federal laws or regulations specifically defining the need to designate certain records as vital.

What Records Are Considered Vital?

Some examples of vital records include contracts and agreements, customer lists, leases, licenses, accounts receivable and payable, insurance policies and personnel payroll information and histories. These are just a few; the Records Management team works with each Department’s Records Coordinator (DRC) to appraise those records that are vital to your department. Only about two to seven percent of records are vital.

Risks To Records:

Fire, water or flood damage, tornado/hurricane damage, equipment malfunction, electronic data loss are all possible hazards that can destroy your department’s information. The very nature of a disaster prevents us from knowing when it is coming, so the time to protect your vital records is now.

Methods of Protecting Vital Records:

- Distribute hard copies of vital records to external locations, away from the primary centers of operations.
- Distribute scanned image files to distant storage locations.
- Store on-site in a fire-resistant vault or in a certified fire - and heat - resistant filing equipment.
- Duplicate electronic records on back-up media, and store them off-site.
- Establish mirror sites of electronic records systems that are identified as vital, and make them resident at distant locations.

Are You Prepared?

Disasters do not consider one’s state of readiness before striking. Knowing what (and what not) to do before, during, and after a disaster will prevent panic, lessen the severity of damage, and enable you to implement an organized recovery operation. If a disaster struck today, would you be able to continue operations in your department? Are you comfortable with your vital records practices? If not, contact Records Management, and let us help you prepare.