

## Retaining Backup Copies of Email and Other Data

Backing up digital communications, data, and other electronic files is an essential IT practice to insure against the loss of valuable information. The purpose of back-ups is to restore a system to a current state (as of the date of the most recent back-up) in case of system failure, or to restore individual files inadvertently deleted or lost. Back-up media is not intended to serve as short or long term storage of information. Retrieval or archive storage is a separate process used to remove or duplicate files from an active system to another system or digital media for short or long-term storage.

The purpose of this policy is to establish a limit on the length of time backups are maintained and to encourage units to distinguish between the purposes and practices of backing-up data vs. retrieval or archive storage of data.

### Email and File Back-up Policy

- Email is managed at many different levels of the university from central IT providers through individual PC users. **This email and file back-up policy applies to centrally managed systems (AIT and ADP) and is recommended to colleges and departments, and other units as best practice.**
- **Back-ups of email and other files should be retained for no more than one year.** Back-up procedures should be established to maintain data long enough to provide a reasonable level of insurance against major data losses. Procedures should be based on the nature of the data, the volatility of the data, etc., and should also be carefully coordinated with retrieval storage practices (Refer to AIT, ADP, or college and department websites for policies relating to various systems.)
- **Files that fall under the university retention guidelines are the responsibility of the user and department.** Such files must be maintained in a retrievable form independent of back-ups. Although backup files may contain files that fall under retention policies, back-ups are intended to restore files not to maintain them for long-term use.

### Definitions:

*Back-up* - A copy of data from an original electronic source transferred to a separate medium (CD, tape, disk). The purpose of back-ups is to restore information lost as a result of purposeful or inadvertent user action or system failure. Example: Daily and weekly backups of an entire system.

*Retrieval Storage (Archive)* - The movement of data from its original source to a separate medium (CD, tape, diskette). The purpose of retrieval storage is to move data no longer needed on a day-to-day basis to another location from which it can be retrieved at a later date, if needed. Example: Movement of dated transaction files to CD or all data from a completed research trial to zip-disk.

*Retention policies* - Legal requirements or policies dictating that records of specific types be maintained in retrievable form for a specific period of time. The purpose of retention

policies is to maintain an audit trail or history of information. Example: Specific personnel records must be retained for X years. Refer to the ISU Record Retention Schedule available from the Provost's Office.

*Local disk* - Data storage on a personal PC managed by the user. Data on local disks may or may not be backed-up.

*Remote disk* - Data storage on a server managed by a server administrator. Data may be transferred to the remote disk by user action or by automatic process. Data on remote disks may or may not be backed-up.

*Deleted files* - When a user deletes files, the files are moved from the active area of either the local or remote disk to "trash". Any files that exist in trash continued to exist until the user empties the trash. Any backups that take place while files remain in trash will be copied to the back-up tape along with all other active files. So while the user believes the file has been deleted, it will continue to exist until the trash is emptied and all backup tapes have been rewritten or destroyed.

*Business files* - official files associated with the business processes of the unit.  
Examples: purchase requisitions, personnel notices, etc.

*Personal files* - non-official files created and/or used by an individual as part of their work.  
Examples: email, spreadsheets, informal memos, etc.

*Lifetime of files* - The lifetime of files on local, remote, or retrieval storage is subject to the practices of the individual and/or the administrator of the remote server. Unless deleted, files exist indefinitely.