

# City of Coquitlam ARCHIVES

## Maintaining Your Digital Records at Home

Are you the family archivist? Do you have the responsibility to maintain your organization's digital assets? These guidelines are for you.

Digital records require more planning and periodic intervention than is necessary for traditional records.

Follow these tips and practical advice – you need only minimal resources!

If your well-cared-for records find their way into an archival repository, the community as a whole will benefit.

### Appoint a Trusted Custodian

A trusted custodian will take on the responsibility for the overall care of all your records after you are no longer able to, particularly those that you identify as vital. This can be a family member, the secretary of your organization, or in some cases, the trusted custodian could be the records creator. It should be a person who can be trusted not to alter the records or allow others to alter them.

### Take Charge of your Records

- ❖ Create a document that explains how all the records are organized. This may be a document that outlines how you label your family photos and explains how your documents are filed in named folders.
- ❖ Update this document regularly and share it with your trusted custodian.
- ❖ Create another document outlining how and where your records are stored. List the digital records formats you use (such as, DOCX, JPEG, MP3, and PDF), and for what purposes you use them.
- ❖ List details of the software and hardware you are using, and keep their original documentation or manuals.
- ❖ Make a plan for changes that should be made within the next few years (see **Preventing Loss** for more information).



### Plan for Hardware and Software Obsolescence

Software and hardware typically become obsolete after five years. To avoid losing your records it is important to:

- ❖ Frequently upgrade the technology you use to create and maintain your records.
- ❖ Keep the document outlining the storage of your digital records up-to-date.

#### Warning!

Heat, light, and moisture are all enemies of long-term digital storage media. Store your digital media in a cool, dark, dry area to prolong their lifespan.

- ❖ Avoid obscure formatting. Non-standard formats increase preservation risks, as their technical support may quickly disappear. As part of knowing your records, plan to move from non-standard to well-known and widely used computer file formats, such as PDF, PDF-A, TIFF, DOCX, MPEG-2.

### Preventing Loss

If your hard drive crashes you could lose all your photographs or records vital to you and/or for the daily operations of your organization.

Preventing the loss of digital records may be avoided by ensuring you have a safety copy of your computer files. There are several ways to do this:

- ❖ Purchase an external hard drive (\$100-\$200) and copy all of your important documents onto this drive and store in a different location.
- ❖ Use a USB Key (\$5-\$50) to make and keep copies of your most valuable documents.
- ❖ Have a schedule. Back up regularly!



[coquitlam.ca/archives](http://coquitlam.ca/archives)

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## More Things to Consider

**Location of Safety Copy:** Consider pairing up with a friend; regularly update your documents together and swap safety copies with each other so that in case of a fire, theft, water damage, or other disaster, another record exists at a different location.

**You may want to have two safety copies:** keep one on an external hard drive or one on a USB key stored in a safe location, like a safety deposit box, or fire proof safe.

**Life of Safety Copy:** Technology does not remain stable, it is important to keep updating your safety devices. USB keys and other storage devices may break and the information on them will degrade overtime.

**Security:** Digital records are very susceptible to accidental, unauthorized or malicious alteration. To help safeguard your records against these hazards, consider saving your finalized documents in widely-used, stable, hard-to-modify, file formats like PDF, so they remain accessible over time and cannot be accidentally changed.

**Avoid Compressed File Types:** Some file formats use a compressed file type to store items at a smaller file size than their original so they don't use up so much file storage space. But some information is lost when using these formats (e.g. JPEG). Instead, consider saving your important photographs as TIFF files.

**E-Mail:** In pre-digital times, bundles of letters were treasured and handed down to future generations; currently there is a different attitude towards correspondence and e-mails are not kept in the same way. Consider printing, or saving

correspondence of special significance (tales of a daughter's travels or letters from the cousin in Afghanistan) outside your e-mail host. It is important to develop criteria for keeping and maintaining e-mail over time.

**Social Media Networks and E-mail:** Do not rely on social networking sites and your email providers for preservation! When you post your photographs on these sites or save images in your emails you are giving up control; your photographs and other documents become property of these businesses. If these companies go out of business or have poor preservation practices, you are likely to lose access to your records.

**Not all Documents Need to be Kept Forever:** Think about which of your documents can be discarded. Delete those files that have no long-term value to you or your organization.

**Creating Paper Copies:** Do not leave all your materials in digital form. A simpler preservation practice may be to print important records and file them with your paper records. For example, you may wish to have your photographs or the minutes of your organization's meetings printed.

### Contact Information

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When the time comes, consider donating your digital records to the Archives. Your donation will help preserve Coquitlam's history and will leave an important legacy for the community.