



November 24, 2024

Alternative Formats and Temporary Records

Dear Reader:

The following document was created from the CTAS website (ctas.tennessee.edu). This website is maintained by CTAS staff and seeks to represent the most current information regarding issues relative to Tennessee county government.

We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with county government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other CTAS website material.

Sincerely,

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Reference Number: CTAS-1198

Generally, if you are only keeping a record for five years or less, it is not cost-efficient to microfilm the original paper records or convert them to other media. But certain records that are "temporary" actually have a rather lengthy retention period. Many court records need to be kept 10 years and employee earning records that may be used for computing retirement benefits are kept for the approximate life of the employee. Even though these records do not have to be kept permanently, you may find it useful to convert them to other more compact formats for storage and destroy the paper originals shortly after they were created. Microfilming or electronic storage of these long-term temporary records can be ideal solutions to storage space problems. Once the records have been duplicated, apply to the County Public Records Commission for approval to destroy the original paper document. Approval of the records commission is necessary prior to the destruction of the original of any record that is still within its retention period.^[1] It is not necessary to notify the Tennessee State Library and Archives of the destruction of original copies of temporary value records.^[2]

Some local government offices are trying to do away with paper versions of some temporary records altogether, creating and storing the records solely in an electronic format. The law authorizes local governments officials to keep any records that the laws requires them to keep in electronic format rather than bound books or paper records.^[3] However, certain stringent guidelines must be met in order to keep the records this way and local officials are strongly cautioned not to keep permanent records solely in an electronic format. Many officials have a dual system for some of their records. Using scanning or imaging technology, some offices create, then primarily use the electronic versions of their records even though paper or microfilm versions are also created and used as a security copy or for long term storage.

[1] T.C.A. § 10-7-404(a).

[2] T.C.A. § 10-7-413.

[3] T.C.A. § 10-7-121. But see T.C.A. § 49-2-301 that requires directors of schools to keep some records in both paper and electronic formats.

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