**How long should I keep records?**

The length of time you should keep a document depends on the action, expense, or event the document records. Generally, you must keep your records that support an item of income or deductions on a tax return until the period of limitations for that return runs out.

The period of limitations is the period of time in which you can amend your tax return to claim a credit or refund, or that the IRS can assess additional tax. The below information contains the periods of limitations that apply to income tax returns. Unless otherwise stated, the years refer to the period after the return was filed. Returns filed before the due date are treated as filed on the due date.

**Note:** Keep copies of your filed tax returns. They help in preparing future tax returns and making computations if you file an amended return.

1. You owe additional tax and situations (2), (3), and (4), below, do not apply to you; keep records for 3 years.
2. You do not report income that you should report, and it is more than 25% of the gross income shown on your return; keep records for 6 years.
3. You file a fraudulent return; keep records indefinitely.
4. You do not file a return; keep records indefinitely.
5. You file a claim for credit or refund\* after you file your return; keep records for 3 years from the date you filed your original return or 2 years from the date you paid the tax, whichever is later.
6. You file a claim for a loss from worthless securities or bad debt deduction; keep records for 7 years.
7. Keep all employment tax records for at least 4 years after the date that the tax becomes due or is paid, whichever is later.

The following information should be applied to each record as you decide whether to keep a document or throw it away.

**For Individuals**

These Record Retention Guidelines provide a general guideline for the retention of many records, but the specific holding periods for any record retention policy should be given careful scrutiny by management and legal advisors in light of any pending investigators, regulated industry requirements or contract covenants.

–BANK STATEMENTS ~ Three Years

–CANCELED CHECKS ~ Three Years

–CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTIONS ~ Keep with applicable tax return

–CREDIT CARD PURCHASE RECEIPTS ~ Discard after purchase appears on credit card statement if not needed for warranties, merchandise returns or taxes.

–CREDIT CARD STATEMENTS ~ Discard after payment appears on credit card statement.

–EMPLOYEE BUSINESS EXPENSE REPORTS ~ Keep with applicable tax return.

–HEALTH INSURANCE POLICIES ~ Keep until policy expires, lapses or is replaced.

–HOME AND PROPERTY INSURANCE ~ Keep until policy expires, lapses or is replaced.

–INCOME TAX RETURNS ~ Permanently

–INVESTMENT SALE & PURCHASE CONFIRMATION RECORDS ~ Discard sale confirmation records when the transactions are correctly reflected on the monthly statement.  Keep purchase confirmation records three to six years after the investment is sold as evidence of cost.

–LIFE INSURANCE ~ Keep until there is no chance of reinstatement.  Discard premium receipts when notices reflect payment.

–MEDICAL RECORDS ~ Permanently

–MEDICAL EXPENSE RECORDS ~ Keep with applicable tax return if deducted.

–MILITARY PAPERS ~ Permanently (may be required for possible veterans benefits)

–INDIVIDUAL RETIREMENT ACCOUNT RECORDS ~ Permanently

–RETIREMENT PLAN STATEMENTS ~ Three to six years.  Keep year-end statements permanently.

–PASSPORTS ~ Keep until expiration.

–PAY STUBS ~ One year.  Discard all but final, cumulative pay stubs for the year.

–PERSONAL CERTIFICATES (Birth/Death, Marriage/Divorce, Religious ceremonies) ~ Permanently

–REAL ESTATE DOCUMENTS ~ Keep three to six years after property has been disposed of and taxes have been paid.

–RESIDENTIAL RECORDS (copies of purchase-related documents, annual mortgage statements, receipts for improvements and copies of rental leases/receipts) ~ Indefinitely

–SOCIAL SECURITY STATEMENTS ~ Discard when current records of payments into the Social Security System are received.

–WARRANTIES AND RECEIPTS ~ Discard expired warranties.  Use judgment when discarding receipts.

–WILL ~ Keep current Will permanently.  Keep until rendered obsolete (by a new version).

**For Businesses**

These Record Retention Guidelines provide a general guideline for the retention of many records, but the specific holding periods for any record retention policy should be given careful scrutiny by management and legal advisors in light of any pending investigations, regulated industry requirements or contract covenants.  In addition to these general guidelines, each business should consider any industry standards which may affect the holding period of records due to the unusual legal circumstances.

**ACCOUNTING RECORDS**

–AUDITOR'S REPORT & ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENTS ~ Permanently

–BANK STATEMENTS AND DEPOSIT SLIPS ~ 7 years

–CANCELED CHECKS:

     –FIXED ASSETS ~ Permanently

     –GENERAL ~ 7 years

     –PAYROLL ~ 7 years

     –TAXES (payroll related) ~ 7 years

     –TAXES (income) ~ Permanently

–CASH DISBURSEMENTS JOURNAL ~ Permanently

–CASH RECEIPTS JOURNAL ~ Permanently

–CHART OF ACCOUNTS ~ Permanently

–CORRESPONDENCE (general) ~ 2 years

–CORRESPONDENCE (routine) WITH CUSTOMERS AND/OR VENDORS ~ 2 years

–DEEDS, MORTGAGES, BILLS OF SALE ~ 2 years

–ELECTRONIC PAYMENT RECORDS ~ 7 years

–EMPLOYEE EXPENSE RECORDS ~ 7 years

–FIXED ASSET RECORDS (invoices, canceled checks, depreciation schedules) ~ Permanently

–FREIGHT BILLS AND BILLS OF LADING ~ 7 years

–GENERAL JOURNAL ~ Permanently

–GENERAL LEDGER ~ Permanently

–INTERNAL REPORTS (miscellaneous) ~ 3 years

–INVENTORY LISTINGS AND TAGS ~ 7 years

–INVOICES: SALES TO CUSTOMERS/ CREDIT MEMOS ~ 7 years

–NOTES RECEIVABLE LEDGERS AND SCHEDULES ~ 8 years

–NOTES PAYABLE LEDGERS AND SCHEDULES ~ Permanently

–PATENT/TRADEMARK AND RELATED PAPERS ~ Permanently

–PAYROLL JOURNAL ~ 7 years

–PETTY CASH VOUCHERS ~ 7 years

–PLANT COST VOUCHERS ~ 7 years

–PRODUCTION AND SALES REPORTS ~ 7 years

–PURCHASES ~ 7 years

–PURCHASE JOURNAL ~ Permanently

–PURCHASE ORDERS ~ 7 years

–RECEIVING SHEETS ~ 1 year

–REQUISITIONS ~ 1 year

–SALES COMMISSION REPORTS ~ 3 years

–SALES OR WORK ORDERS ~ 7 years

–SCRAP AND SALVAGE RECORDS (inventories, sales, etc.) ~ 7 years

–STOCKROOM WITHDRAWAL FORMS ~ 1 year

–SUBSIDIARY LEDGERS (accounts receivable, accounts payable, equipment) ~ 7 years

–TIME CARDS AND DAILY TIME REPORTS ~ 7 years

–TRAINING MANUALS ~ Permanently

–TRIAL BALANCE - YEAR END ~ Permanently

–VOUCHERS FOR PAYMENTS TO VENDORS, EMPLOYEES, ETC. (includes allowances and reimbursement of employees, officers, etc., for travel and entertainment expenses) ~ 7 years

**INSURANCE RECORDS**

–ACCIDENT REPORTS AND SETTLED CLAIMS ~ 7 years after settlement

–FIRE INSPECTION AND SAFETY REPORTS ~ 6 years

–INSURANCE POLICIES (still in effect) ~ Permanently

–INSURANCE POLICIES (expired) ~ 7 years

**LEGAL DOCUMENTS**

–ARTICLES OF INCORPORATION AND BYLAWS ~ Permanently

–BUY-SELL AGREEMENTS ~ Permanently

–CAPITOL STOCK AND BOND RECORDS: LEDGERS, TRANSFER REGISTERS, STUBS SHOWING OPTIONS, ETC. ~ Permanently

–CONTRACTS AND LEASES (still in effect) ~ Permanently

–CONTRACTS AND LEASES (expired) ~ 7 years

–EMPLOYMENT AGREEMENTS ~ 7 years

–LEGAL CORRESPONDENCE ~ Permanently

–MINUTES ~ Permanently

–OPTION RECORDS (expired) ~ 7 years

–PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS ~ Permanently

–PROPERTY APPRAISALS BY OUTSIDE APPRAISERS ~ Permanently

–STOCK CERTIFICATES AND LEDGERS ~ Permanently

**TAX RECORDS**

–IRS OR STATE ADJUSTMENTS ~ Permanently

–PAYROLL TAX RETURNS ~ 7 years

–PROPERTY RECORDS, INCLUDING COSTS, DEPRECIATION RESERVES, YEAR-END TRIAL BALANCES, DEPRECIATION SCHEDULES, BLUEPRINTS AND PLANS ~ Permanently

–SALES AND USE TAX RETURNS ~ Permanently

–TAX RETURNS AND WORK SHEETS, REVENUE AGENTS' REPORTS, AND OTHER DOCUMENTS RELATING TO DETERMINATION OF INCOME TAX LIABILITY, CANCELED CHECKS FOR TAX PAYMENTS ~ Permanently

**PERSONNEL RECORDS**

–CHILD LABOR CERTIFICATES AND NOTICES ~ 3 years

–EMPLOYMENT APPLICATION (from date of termination) ~ 3 years

–EMPLOYMENT ELIGIBILITY VERIFICATION (I-9 form) (from date of termination) ~ 3 years

–GARNISHMENTS ~ 7 years

–HELP WANTED ADS AND JOB OPENING NOTICES ~ 2 years

–PERSONNEL FILES (from date of termination) ~ 7 years

–RECORDS OF JOB INJURIES CAUSING LOSS OF WORK ~ 5 years

–SAFETY: CHEMICAL AND TOXIC EXPOSURE RECORDS ~ 30 years

–UNION AGREEMENTS AND INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYEE CONTRACTS (from date of termination) ~ 3 years

–WITHHOLDING STATEMENTS ~ 7 years

**EMPLOYEE BENEFIT PLAN RECORDS**

–ACTUARIAL REPORTS ~ Permanently

–ALLOCATION AND COMPLIANCE TESTING ~ 7 years

–BROKERAGE/ TRUSTEE STATEMENTS SUPPORTING INVESTMENTS ~ 7 years

–FINANCIAL STATEMENTS ~ Permanently

–GENERAL LEDGER AND JOURNALS ~ Permanently

–INFORMATION RETURNS (form 5500) ~ Permanently

–INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE/ DEPARTMENT OF LABOR CORRESPONDENCE ~  Permanently

–PARTICIPANT COMMUNCIATION RELATED TO DISTRIBUTIONS, TERMINATIONS, BENEFICIARIES ~ 7 years