U.S. Department of Energy

National Energy Technology Laboratory

PROCEDURE 243.2-5C

Title:	**FILES OPERATIONS**
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Cancellation:	Procedure 243.2-5B, Files Operations

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NETL Form 243.1-1, Records Retention and Disposal Authorization

1. **PURPOSE**

   a. To provide guidance for filing and maintaining active and inactive NETL records.

2. **APPLICABILITY**

   a. This procedure applies to all NETL employees and research associates who create NETL records.

3. **PROCEDURE**

The following applies to all NETL records, whether existing records or newly created or recently received.

A file plan allows the rapid retrieval, use, and disposition of records, and lays the groundwork for a successful Records Management Program. A good file plan, one component of a filing system, should be simple and provide structure, flexibility, and uniformity.

a. Procedure for Filing

(1) Planning and Arranging Files

(a) Recordkeeping Requirements — Recordkeeping requirements originate in laws, regulations, and directives that provide general and specific guidance, such as 36 CFR, 44 USC, and agency directives.

List the records meeting recordkeeping requirements as essential records. They will reflect the adequate and proper documentation of the organization, functions, and activities for all offices at all levels and for all records media. Establishing recordkeeping requirements for the office is the first action that needs to be taken in planning for the implementation of the records program for the office.

(b) Official File Stations — Designated organizational units (i.e., file cabinets) should be identified in each division. This is where official file copies of documents will be maintained until project completion or until they are no longer needed for daily government building. The file stations are established to:

- Provide technical control and supervision of official files
- Facilitate coordination between and among file stations
- Assure uniformity in filing and reference procedures.

(2) Centralization and Decentralization of File Stations

(a) Centralized Files — In centralized files, a unit's files are maintained in one location. Consider locating files in a centralized file when:

- More than one work unit has a need for the same files.
- Units are sufficiently near the central file for prompt service.

(b) Decentralized Files — Consider locating files in a decentralized file when:

- Files are of interest to only one work unit.
- Centralized filing is too distant for efficient service.
- Information must be immediately available to the creator.
- Constant reference is made to the files by a particular organizational unit.

(c) Establish a file plan and place a copy of it in the file drawer or post it on the Intranet so that members of your division can access it when needed.

b. <u>File Maintenance</u>

(1) Annually review the file cabinet contents to make certain the filing system is maintained and that documents are filed according to the file plan.

(2) Make sure that documents are appropriately labeled, i.e., CRADA, unclassified controlled information (UCI), PEI (potential environmental impact), EI (environmental impact), R&D, or other markings.

(3) Use coversheets, such as NETL Form 243.1-1, Records Retention and Disposal Authorization, to identify different revisions.

(4) The office managers/file custodians shall ensure that NETL records are properly retained or disposed of in accordance with authorized records schedules.

(5) The records management (RM) staff shall maintain authorizations for disposal of records whose required retention time has expired.

(6) The RM lead shall review and update this procedure as necessary to accommodate changing conditions at NETL and to ensure compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and DOE requirements.

c. File Maintenance Procedures

(1) Avoid Unnecessary Filing — Filing unnecessary papers results is a waste of time and equipment.

(a) Limit Copies — Limit the number of copies prepared to those which are specifically required or which serve a valid purpose.

(b) Eliminate Copies — Eliminate copies of routine communications which require no record, such as routine requests for publications, outgoing form letters, routine transmittals, and copies of letters furnished solely for information, unless it is known that they will be needed for future reference.

(c) Limit "Extra Copy" Files — Limit "extra copy" files to offices having justification for their maintenance.

(d) Limit Technical Reference Documents — Restrict the quantity of technical reference documents received to the minimum necessary, and file only those which will be of significant reference value.

(2) Arranging Folders, Guides, and Labels — The orderly appearance and efficiency of any file depends upon the careful preparation, use, and arrangement of folders and guides in the file drawer. Folders are necessary to keep the papers together and in order.

(3) Guides serve as "sign posts" to help speed up the filing and finding operations. The incorrect use of either folders or guides will retard these operations.

(a) Case Files and Other File Series — Guide cards and folders are important for case files and other types of records, especially if the file collection is large.

Guide cards (i.e., alphabetical, numerical, or other identifying divider) reduce the area of the search and help the folders stand erect. A guide card for every two or three folders is wasteful and defeats the purpose of the guides. Four to 6 guide cards in each drawer or 1 guide to every 10 folders are two rules to follow. As a general rule, place a first position (left) guide card in front of each record series to identify and isolate it from other series in the same drawer. Square-cut folders are recommended for all files.

Carefully and uniformly prepared folder labels are important to any file series.

Labels should be easy to read, precise, and complete.

- Label Preparation — The case file label will normally show the identifying file designation such as a name or number reflecting the arrangement pattern of the series. Also include the document date (month and year) and the disposition schedule. The label is placed on the folder in one position only, the middle position.

- Label Color Codes — File custodians should consider the use of color-coded folder labels to facilitate filing and finding, prevent the misfiling of data, and aid disposition. Color codes can be used to distinguish one series from another, one year from another, or case working papers from case history files.

(4) Preparing File Copies — The following preliminary steps should be taken in preparing documents for filing:

(a) Remove rubber bands, paper clips, and other temporary fasteners.

(b) Determine that the file is complete and all necessary enclosures or attachments are accounted for.

(c) Inspect all documents to ensure they have been authorized for filing.

(d) Ensure that parts of another file are not accidentally attached.

(e) Mend and/or reinforce with transparent tape, all torn or frayed papers.

(f) Destroy duplicate copies of documents to be placed in the same record series.

(g) Place the file copy of an outgoing reply on top of the related incoming letter and any pertinent attachments and staple them together.

(5) Coding Papers for Filing — After the papers have been prepared and assembled for filing, the next step is to code them. Coding segregates the papers into logical categories for ease of filing and finding.

(a) Coding Subject File Papers — Coding subject correspondence material is more complex and distinctly different from coding other types of papers.

(b) Coding Case Papers — Case filing is the easiest and fastest type of filing if the case identification is prominently placed on the face of all papers to be filed.

The file custodian can expect difficulties and filing errors if papers have to be read with great care just to determine whether they belong in a case file series or another type of file. The time required for reading and marking files can be greatly reduced if the case file name or number appears on the papers.

- Preparation of Case File Correspondence — Employees who prepare correspondence should place the case identification in the "TO ATTN OF," "File Reference," or similar caption printed on the letter, or in the subject line of the letter. Underline or circle the case identification if it appears in the body of the letter. If these practices are not always possible or acceptable, enter the case identification in the lower right corner of file copies.

- Filing of Case Papers — Use the identifying name or number for coding case file documents. In most instances, this identification will be found somewhere on the paper and will need to be underlined or circled. If the case identification is not shown on the paper, determine the proper code and write it in the upper right corner.

(6) Cross References — A cross reference is a means of referring to a document by file identification other than that under which it is filed. If a document being coded by subject matter involves more than one subject and there is a possibility it might be asked for by either subject, a cross reference should be prepared as a finding aid.

Sometimes a case file transaction sets a new precedent and it will be requested by subject matter in the future. Accordingly, if an unusual case file document might be requested by its subject matter, a cross reference by subject should be prepared as a finding aid. Avoid making and filing unnecessary cross reference forms, as they take up valuable space and time.

(a) Preparation — Extra copies may be used as a cross reference.

(b) Cross Referencing Relocated Material — A cross reference is also used to indicate that a record has been moved from one place in the file to another, such as bringing forward a piece of correspondence from a cutoff or closed file for attaching to a letter in the current file.

(7) Placing Material in the Files — Match the file designation of each file unit with the folder label before placing it in the folder. Always place the most recent date on top or in front.

Below are guidelines for fastening papers or filing loose:

(a) Fasten Papers for:

- Large case files that receive extensive use and have a long life.

- Any other file for which the entire folder is charged out and which contains valuable information.

(b) Avoid File Fasteners for:

- Subject and other files when individual papers rather than entire folders are charged out.
- Small, routine case files.
- Larger case files with low reference or short life.

(8) Locating Papers in the Files — The following steps illustrate how to locate papers.

(a) Obtain sufficient information to identify the file, such as the file number or subject, and the date.

(b) If given the name, title, or number of the case file, or the subject of the file, you can go directly to that case file.

(c) If the material cannot be located in the files and is of recent date, check the unfilled material on the file custodian's or coder's desk.

(9) Removing Material from the Files — When records are removed from the file and forwarded to an individual or office, a record of this removal should be filled out and put in the folder or file drawer in place of the withdrawn. The file custodian should review the removal records periodically and request the return of records that have been charged out for a long period of time. When the material is returned to the file, remove the charge-out card and draw a line through the entry indicating the charge. Use of this form will eliminate wasted efforts searching for the documents.

(10) Maintaining the Files — The following instructions will assist in maintaining the files.

(a) Identify File Drawers — Label file drawers to indicate what files or subjects are filed in them. Include the year of the records and also the disposition schedule.

(b) Prevent Overcrowding the Files — Allow at least 4 inches of space in each active file drawer to permit sufficient working space.

(c) Keep Papers Straight — When placing material in file folders, do not let the papers extend beyond the edges of the folders. Crease or fold papers when necessary.

(d) Avoid Overloading File Folders — As the content of folders increases, enlarge the folder by creasing the bottom of the folder leaves at the second expansion line to increase the capacity of the folder, or request another folder.

When the folder content reaches 3/4 inches, add a new folder bearing the same file designation in front of the full folder and show inclusive dates on the folders; or subdivide the contents of the folder, if practical, by adding new file designations.

(e) Avoid Cluttering the Files — Bulky material should not be mixed with standard size documents. This material can be cross referenced so that it can be readily identified with the related papers in the regular files.

d. Standard Subject Coding System Concepts

(1) Coding by Subject — A standard subject coding system provides a uniform system for organizing the small but important collection of files that do not lend themselves to arrangement by a name or number. Termed "general correspondence," these files are arranged by subject as a standard practice.

(2) Applicability — A standard subject coding system should be used at file stations where general correspondence files are maintained. The system is useful in organizing program correspondence. Program correspondence relates to the assigned mission, function, or responsibilities of an office. If there is sufficient volume, also use the standard subject coding system to organize the correspondence regarding internal administration or housekeeping activities.

(3) Distinguishing Subject Correspondence from Other File Groups — The standard subject coding system applies to general correspondence papers ONLY. Do not apply it to case files. To correctly maintain files, knowing how subject correspondence is distinguished from case files and other records is necessary.

For example — A letter regarding activities in general or a letter concerning the processing of contracts in general is considered to be subject correspondence material and is filed in the subject correspondence file. In contrast to this, a letter regarding a specific contract or grant is not considered to be general correspondence. Papers of this type are placed in a case file to document the specific transaction.

(a) Avoid Cluttering the Files — Bulky material should not be mixed with standard size documents. This material can be cross referenced so that it can be readily identified with the related papers in the regular files.

(4) Type of System — The standard subject coding system consists of selected main (primary) subject titles with related subjects grouped in outline form as

subdivisions of the primary subject titles. These subdivisions are known as secondary (second-level) subjects, tertiary (third-level) subjects, and quaternary (fourth-level subjects).

(5) Master Outline — A standard subject coding system may be created and its complete list of subjects may also be referred to as the master outline.

(6) Subject File Codes

(a) The coding scheme used in the standard subject coding system consists of a four-digit numeric code. Additional digits may be added. The last two digits of the primary titles consist of "00." Secondaries have assigned numbers in the "tens" position. Tertiaries have assigned numbers in the "ones" position. An example of file codes under this system follows:

- Primary Subject: 1300 Management Systems and Standards.
- Secondary Subject: 1330 Management Information Systems.
- Tertiary Subject: 1331 Integrated Management Information Systems.

(b) The assigned code indicates the subject. Instead of writing out the complete subject title, use of the code facilitates marking, sorting, and filing papers. For example:

240 Records Management, includes Forms Management, Records Disposition, and Records Management
- 240 General
- 241 Scientific and Technical Information Management
- 242 Forms Management
- 243 Records Management
  - 243.1 – Records Audits
  - 243.2 – Records Disposition
    - 243.2A – Records Inventory
    - 243.2B – Records Retention Policies
    - 243.2C – Intent to Destroy Notifications
    - 243.2D – Certificate of Records Destruction
  - 243.3 – Classified Records Management

e. <u>Coding File Papers by Subject</u>

(1) Basic Steps in Coding by Subject — Coding correspondence by subject is more complex and distinctly different from coding other types of papers. Papers must be read and analyzed, then coded by the appropriate subject on the basis of their informational content. How quickly a particular document can be located after it

has been filed depends largely on how carefully it has been coded before filing. The basic steps in coding subject material are as follows:

(a) Analyze — Read and analyze the document to determine its major subject. The subject line appearing above the body of the correspondence is often helpful in coding but should not be relied upon too heavily. It may be vague, misleading, or even remote from the real subject of the correspondence concerned.

(b) Select — Select the proper file code from the office subject file outline. First, select the appropriate primary subject code and then the correct subdivision of the primary subject, if any. If no subdivision has been provided, use the primary subject itself as the file designation code. When a sufficient volume of paper accumulates on a subdivision which was not originally selected as a subject topic, add the new topic to the file outline and create a folder to accommodate these papers.

(c) Code — Write the subject's numeric file code in the upper right hand corner of the file copy.

(d) Underscore — Lightly underscore the reference when papers refer to previous papers already on file. This will emphasize that there are previous papers involved. Earlier material should be consolidated with later correspondence on the same subject.

(2) Techniques in Coding

(a) Noticing — The knack of noticing essential key phrases in correspondence helps one to select the correct file designation. The subject matter is sometimes difficult to determine. In such instances, it is helpful to consider the correspondence in this light: "why was it written?" Usually the purpose for writing suggests the subject under which it should be filed.

(b) Reference — It is helpful at times to refer to previous correspondence already on file to verify a tentatively selected file designation.

(c) Be Consistent — Be consistent is the first coding rule. Consistency will assure that papers currently being coded will be filed with the previous papers with which they belong.

(d) Unusual Cases — In unusual cases the subject of correspondence is so extremely vague that it is impossible to determine the proper file code from the letter itself. In such cases, the coder should contact someone more familiar with the material for more information.

f. Records Disposition Program

(1) NETL Procedure 243.2-7, Records Scheduling and Disposition, can provide guidance on records needing to be scheduled. It is available on line at http://intranet/procedures/directiv/procedur.htm.

(2) Review of Records Schedules — Each office is responsible for scheduling their records and complying with the provisions of records disposition schedules. Files should be checked at least annually to determine that the applicable records disposition schedules are adequate and are being followed.

g. Quality Control

(1) Paper Files — Documents maintained in file cabinets shall be inspected annually by the record custodians. The inspection shall include an assessment of the physical condition of the records as well as the conformance to the appropriate record schedules.

(2) Electronic Documents — Hard (paper) copies of electronic records shall be inspected as received by the records custodian to ensure that all required transmission and receipt data is included with a record copy.

(3) Retired (Boxed) Paper Documents — Hard copies of retired paper documents kept in boxes shall be reviewed periodically by the records personnel to assure they continue to be in acceptable physical condition and to assess conformance with the appropriate record schedules.

(4) Other Media — Copies of other records, including books, maps, photographs, film, machine-readable materials, magnetic tape, or other documentary materials, shall be inspected annually by record custodians, to assure they continue to be in acceptable physical condition and are in conformance with the appropriate record schedules.

(5) This procedure will be reviewed annually and as necessary to accommodate changing conditions at NETL and to ensure compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and DOE requirements.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. NETL Director of Information Technology

(1) Ensure that the Records Management Program is administered in accordance with the requirements of all federal laws and regulations, executive orders, DOE orders, accepted external standards, and authoritative issuances.

b. Records Officer

(1) Ensure that NETL has an effective File Operations Program in place.

c. Records Personnel

(1) Offer guidance to employees in developing and maintaining an accredited file system for NETL records.

(2) Provide education and training to NETL employees on records management.

(3) Conduct assessment of inactive records annually to ensure records are appraised, inventoried, and proper disposition of items described.

(4) Ensure only “record” material is being transferred to the NETL records facility.

(5) Periodically (but at least annually) review this procedure and recommend revisions as necessary.

d. Contracting Officials

(1) Assure all site support contracts include requirements for compliance with this procedure.

(2) Ensure the appropriate records are identified as contract deliverables, including records pertaining to the environment, safety, and health; financial and technical records; and other specified records as appropriate to the contract scope.

(3) Make certain that records identified as contract deliverables are handled in accordance with the requirements of this procedure and other relevant procedures, laws, and regulations and delivered to NETL at appropriate intervals, per the contracts, or at the termination of the contract.

(4) Prior to forwarding records to retention, include final payment date on NETL Form 243.1-1, Records Retention and Disposal Authorization.

e. Project Managers

(1) Appoint and instruct file custodians to participate and adhere to this policy.

f. NEPA Compliance Officer

(1) Establish a central, segregated storage area for all NEPA records in coordination with the records officer.

g. Office Managers/File Custodians

(1) Establish and maintain file stations in accordance with this procedure.

(2) Identify and evaluate records maintained in assigned area as records and non-records.

(3) Complete inventory and appraisal recommendation.

h. NETL Employees

(1) Comply with this procedure and other records management procedures as applicable.

5. TRAINING

a. NETL employees shall complete the introduction to records management computer-based training (CBT).

b. Upon acceptance of an assignment that entails file or record responsibilities, employees are required to read this procedure (and any subsequent revision) and be aware of its contents and directions.

c. Additional training requirements will be promoted in training, newsletter articles, and on the Records Management webpage.

6. RECORD CONTROL

a. Office managers should maintain up-to-date copies of file plans in their areas. A copy of the file plan should be submitted to records management to assist with reporting efforts, inventories, and records requests from HQ, congressional requests, or internal requests.

b. All records produced by this procedure will be dispositioned according to GRS 23, Item 8. Destroy or delete when 2 years old, or 2 years after date of last entry, whichever is applicable.

7. REQUIREMENTS

a. Title 36 CFR, Chapter 12, Subchapter B, "Records Management."

b. Title 44 U.S.C., Chapter 29, "Records Management by the Archivist of the United States and the Administrator of General Services."

c. Title 44 U.S.C., Chapter 31, "Records Management by Federal Agencies."

d. Title 44 U.S.C., Chapter 33, "Disposal of Records."

e. DOE Department-Wide Interim Records Management Program Policy.

f. DOE Order 200.1, Information Management Program.

g. DOE Order 243.1, Records Management Program.

h. NETL Order 243.2, Records Management Program.

8. REFERENCES

a. Records Management webpage at http://intranet/it/records/records.htm.

9. DEFINITIONS

a. Case Files — Records, regardless of media, document a specific action, event, person, place, project, or other matter. Case files include personnel, project, or transaction files.

b. Coding — In this instance, coding is used to mean placing a numeric code from the subject matter categories.

c. Cutoff — Refers to the breaking or ending of files at regular intervals, usually at the close of a fiscal or calendar year. This allows for records to be disposed of if applicable or transferred in complete blocks to the NETL records archives. It also allows for the establishment of new files.

d. Disposition — The actions taken regarding records no longer needed for current Government business. These actions can include the transfer of records to NETL records archives or to a Federal Records Center, transfer from one federal agency to another, or transfer of permanent records to the National Archives.

e. Electronic Record — Any information that is recorded by or in a format that only a computer can process and that satisfies the definition of a federal record in 44 U.S.C. 3301.

f. File Plan — A file plan is a document containing the identifying number, title or description, and disposition authority of files held in an office. The file plan should contain up-to-date and accurate disposition authorities and retention periods for all records and non-record materials maintained in the office.

g. File Station — A file station is an organizational unit where records are maintained.

h. Non-record Materials — Non-record material refers to information contained on any media not having documentary or evidential value. The term includes stocks of publications, library material, and duplicates copies of file material such as reading files, processed or published materials, catalogues, trade journals, and papers of transitory value such as worksheets, informal notes, and routing slips. Non-record material should be destroyed when its purpose is served.

i. Personal Papers — Personal papers consist of documentary materials belonging to an individual that are not used to conduct official business. They relate solely to an individual's personal and private affairs or are used exclusively for that individual's convenience. Personal papers must be clearly marked as such and kept separate from official records.

j. Records — Records include all books, papers, maps, photographs, machine-readable materials, or other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received by an agency of the United States Government under federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business and preserved or appropriate for preservation by that agency or its legitimate successor as evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the Government or because of the informational value of the data in them (44 U.S.C. 3301).

k. Records Disposition Schedules (also Records Schedules) — A document providing mandatory instructions for what to do with records (and non-record materials) no longer needed for current Government business. NETL uses the CIO Records Disposition Schedules, located at http://cio.doe.gov/RBManagement/Records/dissched.htm. If unable to find an applicable records schedule with the CIO Records Disposition Schedule, refer to the NARA General Records Schedules located at http://www.archives.gov/records_management/records_schedules.html. Also known as records disposition schedule, records retention schedule, retention schedule, or records schedule.

l. Records Series — File units or documents arranged in accordance with a filing system or maintained as a unit because they relate to a particular subject or function, result from the same activity, have a particular form, or because of some other relationship arising out of their creation, receipt, or use. In machine-readable records, a database or grouping of closely interrelated data elements within or among databases can be considered a records series.

m. Temporary Records — Records which are disposable after a fixed period of time or, if NARA has granted an exemption, after an event.

10. **REVISION HISTORY**

VERSION	DATE	SUMMARY OF CHANGES
Original	9/10/03	To instruct staff on filing NETL records to ensure effective controls over the creation, the maintenance, the use of, and the destruction of records while conducting current NETL business.
A	11/23/04	The procedure has been rewritten. Significant changes were made to update the references, reassign responsibilities, simplify procedures, and identify the Records Management web page as a reference source for instructions and guidance.
B	2/14/06	Minor revisions were made in the Definitions section and the Responsibilities section.
C	4/7/08	Changes were made to put the directive into the new directives format, make non-substantive changes, and add a flow chart of the process.

ATTACHMENT 1

FLOW CHART OF THE PROCEDURE

Filing

Planning and Arranging Files

List records meeting record keeping requirements as essential records.

Designate official file stations in each division.

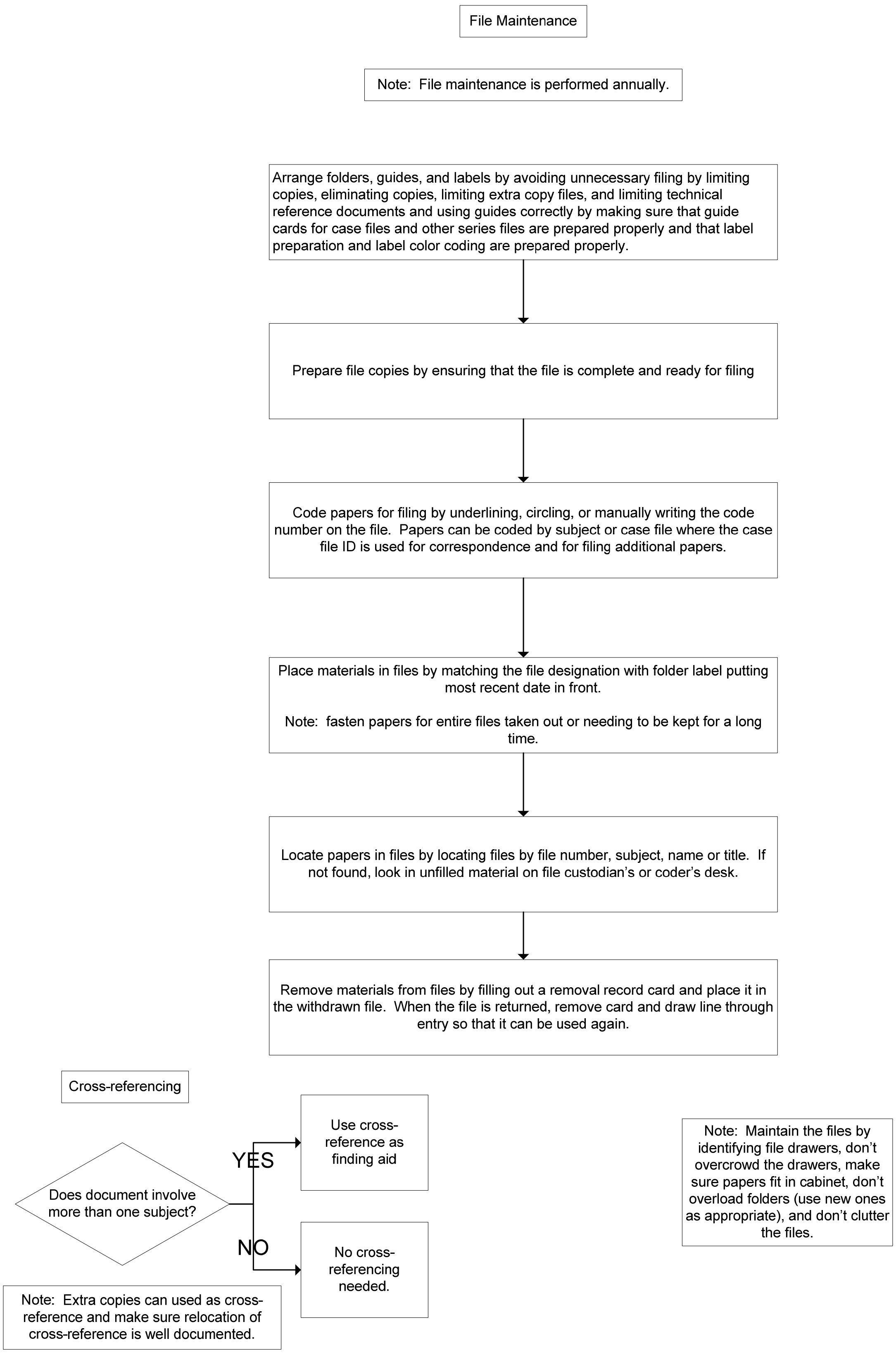
Centralization and Decentralization of File Stations

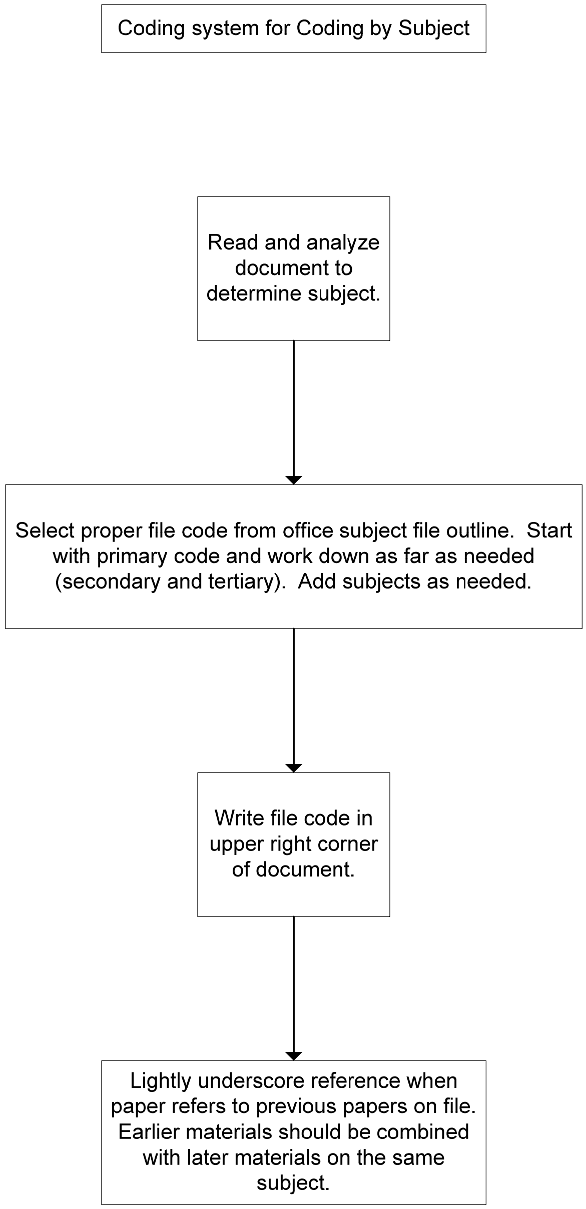
Centralized files - maintained in one location

Consider this option when more than one work unit has a need for the same files and units are sufficiently near the central file for prompt service.

Decentralized files – not maintained in one location

Consider this option when files are of interest to only one work unit, centralized filing is too distant for efficient service, information must be immediately available to the creator, and constant reference is made to the files by a particular organizational unit.


File Maintenance
Note: File maintenance is performed annually.
Arrange folders, guides, and labels by avoiding unnecessary filing by limiting copies, eliminating copies, limiting extra copy files, and limiting technical reference documents and using guides correctly by making sure that guide cards for case files and other series files are prepared properly and that label preparation and label color coding are prepared properly.
Prepare file copies by ensuring that the file is complete and ready for filing
Code papers for filing by underlining, circling, or manually writing the code number on the file. Papers can be coded by subject or case file where the case file ID is used for correspondence and for filing additional papers.
Place materials in files by matching the file designation with folder label putting most recent date in front.
Note: fasten papers for entire files taken out or needing to be kept for a long time.
Locate papers in files by locating files by file number, subject, name or title. If not found, look in unfilled material on file custodian's or coder's desk.
Remove materials from files by filling out a removal record card and place it in the withdrawn file. When the file is returned, remove card and draw line through entry so that it can be used again.
Cross-referencing
Does document involve more than one subject?
YES
Use cross-reference as finding aid
NO
No cross-referencing needed.
Note: Extra copies can used as cross-reference and make sure relocation of cross-reference is well documented.
Note: Maintain the files by identifying file drawers, don't overcrowd the drawers, make sure papers fit in cabinet, don't overload folders (use new ones as appropriate), and don't clutter the files.


Coding system for Coding by Subject
Read and analyze document to determine subject.
Select proper file code from office subject file outline. Start with primary code and work down as far as needed (secondary and tertiary). Add subjects as needed.
Write file code in upper right corner of document.
Lightly underscore reference when paper refers to previous papers on file. Earlier materials should be combined with later materials on the same subject.