

Record retention guide

Filing your tax papers away can be a chore. Perhaps you need to make a clean sweep of the file cabinet.

The IRS advises that you keep your tax returns forever, but much of the supporting documentation can be destroyed after the statute of limitations for the tax year is over (three years in most cases). You can use the following guide to help make your decision.

1 YEAR

Copies (misc.)
Correspondence (routine)
Duplicate deposit slips
Stenographer's notebooks

Employee payroll records
Inventory of products, materials and supplies
Safety records
Sales records
Scrap and salvage records
Stock and bond certificates (cancelled)
Subsidiary ledgers
Time cards and daily reports
Voucher register and schedules
Voucher for payments made

Divorce decrees, alimony and child custody agreements

Financial statements
General and private ledgers
Insurance records (existing)
Internal audit reports

Journals
Military records
Minute books
Property appraisals and records
Retirement plan information (IRA, 401(k), etc.)

Savings bond registration

Tax returns

Training manuals

Union agreements

W-2/s/proof of income

3 YEARS

Appointment books
Correspondence (general)
Employee personnel records (after termination)
Insurance policies (expired)
Internal reports (misc.)
Petty cash vouchers

PERMANENTLY

Adoption papers
Articles of incorporation
Audit reports of accountants

Birth certificates

Bylaws

Capital stock and bond records

Cancelled checks (important payments)

Cash books

Charts of accounts

Citizenship papers

Contracts and leases (expired)

Contracts and leases (existing)

Copyright, patent and trademark registration

Death certificates

Deeds, mortgages and bills of sale

Depreciation schedules

5 YEARS

Invoices
Loan documents
Notes receivable ledgers and schedules
Purchase orders

7 YEARS

Accident reports and claims (settled)
Accounts payable ledgers and schedules
Bank statements
Brokerage statements
Cancelled checks (misc.)
Employee expense reports

