



Office of Personnel

Personnel Policy Manual

S297_2

Access to Official Materials in Employees' Desks

For bargaining unit employees, see applicable [Union/Management Contracts](#) in addition to the Personnel Policy Manual (PPM). Contract provisions take precedence over the PPM.

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I. PURPOSE

This chapter contains the policies and procedures for storing and accessing official materials in employees' desks. Sections [IV.A.](#) and [IV.B.](#) contain HHS policies stated in the HHS Records Management Manual, Chapter 1-70, Storage of Record Materials in Employee Desks, since most supervisors do not have access to this manual. Sections [IV.C.](#) and [IV.D.](#) contain additional SSA guidelines.

II. EMPLOYEES COVERED

This chapter covers all SSA employees.

III. COMMONLY USED TERMS

A. Classified Materials

Classified materials as used herein is the collective name for documents, reference materials, or other materials which require protection in the interests of national security.

Classified materials may include either official records or working papers, as defined below.

B. Official Records

Official records are defined by law (Records Disposal Act of July 7, 1943, as amended, 44 USC 366) as follows:

All books, papers, maps, photographs or other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received by any agency of the United States Government in pursuance of 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 data contained therein.

C. Working Papers

Working papers as used herein is the collective name for draft documents, reference materials or other materials, none of which constitute official records.

IV. DETAILED PROVISIONS

A. Storage of Materials in Employees' Desks

1. Official records shall be stored in repositories specifically designated for them. Official records should not be stored in employees' desks.

2. Subject to the provisions set forth in Chapter [IV.B.](#), employees may, for protective reasons, temporarily maintain official records and administratively sensitive materials in their desks while they are actively working with such records or materials. Materials classified for security purposes should be treated, protected and stored in accordance with the applicable provisions of the HHS Security Manual.

3. Subject to the provisions in Chapter [IV.B.](#), employees may temporarily store working papers in their desks if there is no more appropriate place provided in which to store them.

B. Access to Employees' Desks

1. If the materials in any employee's desk might be needed for official business during his/her absence, the employee should inform those who would need to have access to such materials that they are stored in the employee's desk and the employee should authorize his/her supervisor to remove or authorize others to remove the materials from the employee's desk when they are needed for the conduct of Government business.

2. No official or employee of HHS may open an employee's desk and examine its contents or authorize any other person to do so without the permission of the employee who occupies the desk, unless prior written approval has been obtained from the principal administrative officer or one of his/her designees. All requests for such approval should state the reason(s) for the desk check. A desk may be checked without the occupant's permission only if there are unusually compelling reasons to make such a check; e.g., security inspections of offices which handle classified materials or an urgent search for official documents, working papers or property when the user of the desk is absent and there is reason to believe the employee is holding such materials in violation of regulations. The checking of an employee's desk should be authorized only when absolutely necessary.

C. SSA Delegations of Authority

[See delegations of authority.](#) When a desk is opened, the employee must be notified as soon as feasible.

D. SSA Guidelines

There is no indication that access to employees' desks has been a problem in SSA. In those work situations where a supervisor may have a practical need for guidelines in addition to those provided in Chapter IV.A. and Chapter IV.B., the following guides are provided for application as the situation may warrant. "Official materials" as used below covers all papers defined in Chapter III.

1. Supervisors may obtain written authorization, as stated in Chapter IV.B., from employees to enter their desks in their absence to obtain official materials needed for the conduct of Government business. Employee authorization is voluntary.

2. Supervisors may require that official materials be stored only in official repositories such as file cabinets.

3. Supervisors may require that employees store official materials in a specified desk compartment only, when storage is made in desks, with the understanding that the supervisor has access to the specified compartments in the employees' absence. The understanding may be written or oral, as the supervisor deems appropriate.

4. Supervisors may require employees to obtain prior approval to store materials in their desks. If an employee refuses to authorize the supervisor's access to the official materials in his/her absence, the supervisor may withhold such approval and require storage in official repositories.

V. RELATED REFERENCES

HHS Records Management Manual, Chapter 1-70, Storage of Record HHS Records Management Manual, Chapter 1-70, Storage of Record Materials in Employee Desks.