

Strasbourg, 18 June 2014

DGA/DIT/IMD(2014)2

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# Weeding guide: sorting archive paper and electronic documents

To keep or not to keep? That is the question

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## 1. Introduction

Archives are "departmental activity-specific, unique and original documents, subject to detailed rules for processing and preservation" (source: French Archivists Association (AAF)).

There are three phases in the lifecycle of archives:

- current archives,
- intermediate archives,
- permanent or historical archives.

This is a guide to good archive sorting practices. This absolutely indispensable procedure will be relevant to each phase of the document lifecycle and applicable to all paper and electronic documents created or received, on whichever media.

### Four main reasons for sorting:

- Guaranteeing better protection for key documents while controlling the quality and quantity of records;
- Facilitating access to frequently used documents;
- Preserving documents of historical interest;
- Making substantial savings in terms of space and financial and human resources.

The sorting procedure entails separating the documents to be destroyed from those which will be preserved. It is chiefly based on the department's Retention/Disposal schedule which determines the retention period and the final action to be taken on documents (see [User Guide to Retention and Disposal Schedules](#)).

It will result in documents either being deposited in the electronic records system, deposited as physical archives, or destroyed (see [Archiving procedures at the Council of Europe](#)).

## 2. Glossary

### Destruction

Material process of eliminating documents whose preservation is no longer justified.

### File

A file is a set of documents compiled either in the course of the running or processing of an activity by those responsible or by logical grouping when the documents are filed in archives.

### Length of administrative value (LAV - French abbreviation DUA)

Period for which documents are necessary to a department's ongoing activity. During this period, which corresponds to the minimum period of preservation, the document may not be destroyed.

### Retention period/Length of retention (or length of preservation)

This is the total duration for which the document must be kept in the department and then kept in archives. In the case of historical archives this duration is unlimited.

**Sorting or weeding**

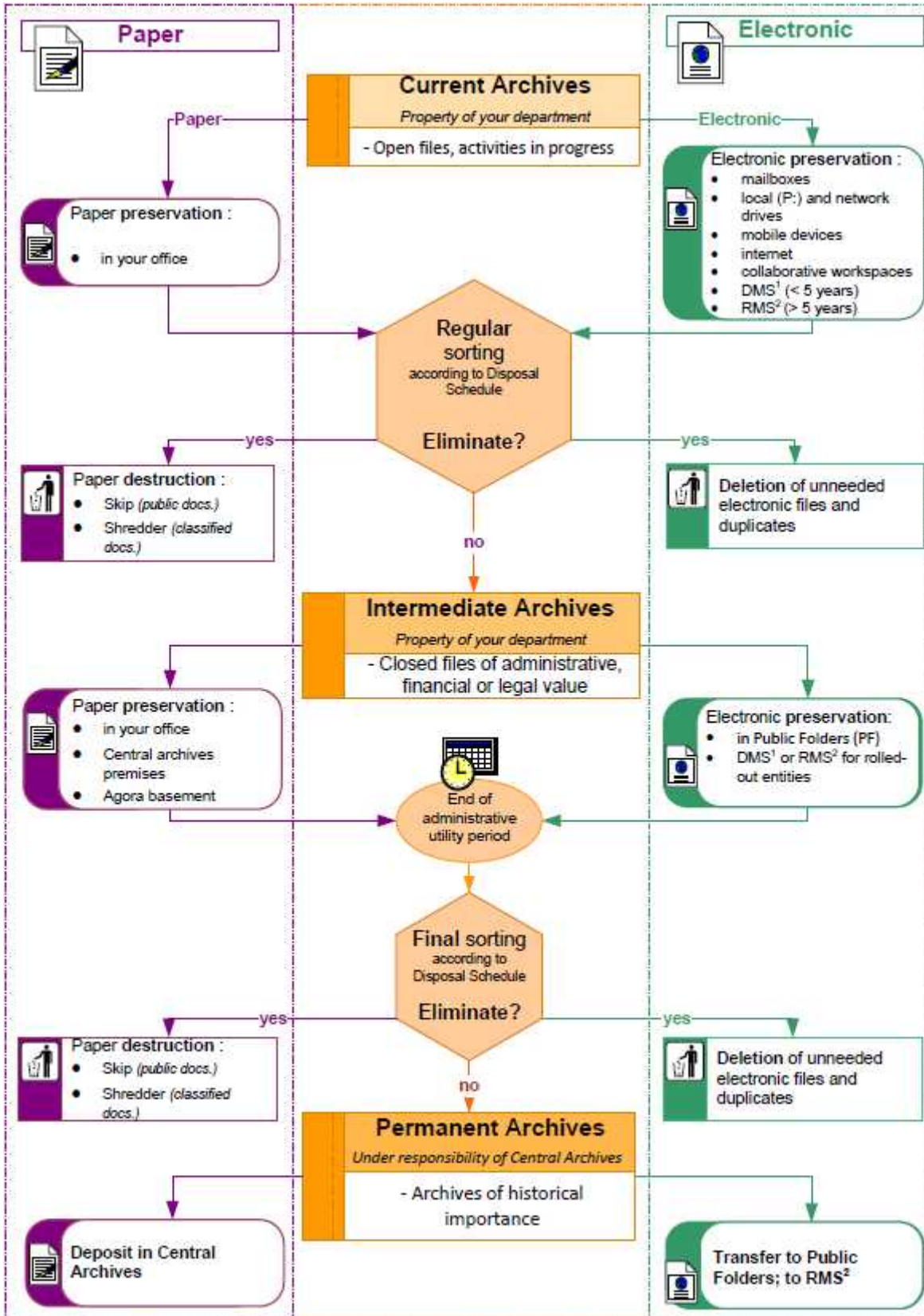
Operation entailing the selection of the documents to be destroyed and those to be preserved permanently on grounds of their historical interest.

**Retention/Disposal schedule**

Archive management tool drawn up jointly by the producer department and the administrative team in archives. It reflects the department's functional organisation and determines, for each set of documents, a retention period and the final action to be taken (destruction or permanent preservation).

See the list of [retention/disposal schedules of the Council of Europe](#)

3. Document weeding flowchart



1 : DMS, Document Management System – Ongoing roll-out at the Council of Europe.  
 2 : RMS; Records Management System – Ongoing roll-out at the Council of Europe.  
 Updated 23/06/2014

## 4. Sorting paper archives

### 4.1 Current archives

#### Definition

Current archives are the files frequently used for ongoing activities.

#### Storage site

The files are kept in the office or nearby so that they are close at hand.

#### Recommendations

Manage current files efficiently. They will be faster and easier to archive if they are structured and well maintained.

Organise current files with a view to eliminating documents in the future. Sort them on a regular basis at least twice a year.

Eliminate any unnecessary clutter in them.

Refer to your retention/disposal schedule to check which document is the master. If the master is an electronic document, there is no need to archive the paper version.

### 4.2 Intermediate archives

#### Definition

These are closed files preserved by the author departments in accordance with the administrative utility period, taking account of departmental needs and the statutory periods of limitation, including the files which, after sorting, will be deposited in the Council of Europe's Central Archives.

They are consulted on the basis of their legal, financial or administrative importance and often relate to a completed activity or project.

#### Storage site

These files may be stored:

- in the storage areas of the author department: office, corridor;
- in a reserved space in the basement of the Agora building. If the department does not yet have one, its [Archives correspondent](#) must contact Central Archives via [form 1604](#) in the Multiservice Assistant.

At the end of the administrative utility period the author department must:

- either destroy the files scheduled for destruction ([form 1603](#) in the Multiservice Assistant (Please note that destruction requires validation by Central Archives, who will inspect each batch of documents to identify any historical archives).
- or deposit them in Central Archives for permanent preservation ([form 1600](#) in the Multiservice Assistant).

### 4.3 Permanent or historical archives

#### Definition

These are files whose administrative utility period has expired.

They are of historical interest or necessary to manage and justify the rights of physical or legal persons.

#### Storage site

These files are stored in Central Archives ([form 1600](#) in the Multiservice Assistant).

#### Recommendation

Items to be removed from files before depositing them in archives:

- Rough drafts, draft letters,
- Incomplete notes (no date or author),
- Unneeded reference material,
- Duplicates,
- Plastic sleeves,
- Paper clips, elastic bands.

## 5. Sorting electronic archives

The principles and rules for preserving electronic documents/records produced or received in the professional sphere are defined in each MAE's retention/disposal schedule.

The notion of a three-phase lifecycle for archives applies equally to electronic documents.

**IMPORTANT:** When destroying electronic archives, it must be ensured that any copies (copies are sometimes numerous and located in various different repositories) are also destroyed.

### 5.1 Current archives

#### Definition

The files in frequent use that correspond to activities in progress are considered as current archives.

#### Storage areas

##### *Directories*

- *Personal drives (P:) (E :)*

On the P: drive (limited to 400MB, backed up but not shared):

- working documents drawn up by individuals;
- external documentation, produced by other departments or organisations, used as a source of information on activities in progress.

The E: drive is used to file the personal items or documents of personal interest which are tolerated, with the exception of very voluminous files such as MP3, JPEG, EXE, PST.

- *Shared directories*

Documents produced by individual or collective efforts are stored in:

- the Document management system (DMS) – for documents that are not finalised and documents with a limited lifespan (up to 5 years), shared within the Council of Europe and the entity;
- the Records management system (RMS) – for finalised documents, to be kept for a long period (beyond 5 years) and documents with evidential value or fiscal importance (even if the retention period is less than 5 years);
- collaborative workspaces – shared by a restricted number of individuals (in-house and external) working on projects limited in time;
- the shared workspaces authorised by the DIT – mainly shared databases;
- Public Folders, if the Document and Records management systems have not yet been deployed within the entity.

or on websites (Transit, Jahia, Liferay).

### **Recommendations**

Sort your files from time to time:

- delete the provisional versions once the definitive version has been finalised;
- transfer the final version to a corresponding directory in Public Folders. If the entity already operates the Records management system (RMS), move the final version into it, but if changes are yet to be made, create/move the document in/into the Document management system (DMS);
- delete any out-of-date external documentation;
- transfer any documentation that might be of interest to your colleagues to an area intended for sharing information;
- make regular checks on the private files stored on your P: drive and delete the ones you no longer need (training requests, vacancy applications).

**Sorting is not needed if documents are in the Document and Records Management Systems. The Records Management System sorts them automatically by applying the retention policies agreed on by entities.**

### ***Personal and shared mailboxes***

*Responsibility for preserving incoming or outgoing messages:*

- if the message was created within the Council, its author is responsible for preserving the message and all the replies and responses it prompted;
- if the message was modified by the addressee, it is that person who is responsible;
- if the message comes from an external source, is linked to the activity and is the sole copy, it is also the responsibility of the addressee to preserve it.

- *Personal mailboxes*

These are the areas in which e-mails are created, sent, received and stored on a temporary and individual basis, with or without attachments.

- *Shared mailboxes*

Mailboxes shared by several users have the same functions as personal mailboxes. They concern solely work-related mail and enable users to share message processing.

See the diagrams:

- [Managing e-mails in the old environment](#) (PFs)
- [Managing e-mails in the "Electronic document and records management system"](#) (DMS and RMS)

**Recommendations:**

Use the functionalities provided by Outlook to sort e-mails

Do not keep e-mails any longer than necessary, make regular deletions in your "Inbox" and "Sent Items", particularly of:

- any mail that is not work-related,
- mail of short-lived importance,
- copied messages, unless they are of real interest to you.

Empty the "Deleted Items" directory on a regular basis

See the documents giving recommendations on this point: [Recommendations for e-mail](#) and [E-mail Etiquette - ADMIN/TI\(2013\)18 e](#)

Move mail of administrative, legal or historical importance to the Records Management System. If this tool is not deployed within your entity, move the mail to the corresponding Public Folder directory.

***Collaborative workspaces (SharePoint, TIKIWiki)***

These are applications making it possible to federate and simplify teamwork. They are very useful for activities over a defined period, notably within a project's lifespan. Most of these applications also offer forums, blogs and a means of publishing articles.

**Recommendations**

All the documents created or stored in collaborative workspaces must be assessed in terms of their retention period and the final action to be taken on them.

It is also vital to draw up a retention/disposal schedule for each collaborative workspace hosting documents with a retention period of more than five years and to designate a person responsible for archiving them in Public Folders pending their transfer to the Records management system.



## 5.2 Intermediate archives

### Definition

These are files preserved by the author departments in accordance with the administrative utility period, taking account of departmental needs and the statutory periods of limitation.

They are consulted on the basis of their legal, financial or administrative importance and often relate to a completed activity or project.

### Storage site

For the entities which do not yet use the Document management system (DMS) or the Records management system (RMS), intermediate archives must be kept in Public Folders.

### Recommendations

Transfer intermediate archives to Public Folders pending introduction of the DMS or the RMS.

Organise files into directories and sub-directories using the same filing system as their paper equivalent to make both searching and sorting easier.

Manage these documents in accordance with their retention period and the final action to be taken on them (consult the entity's Retention/Disposal schedule).

Destroy the documents whose administrative utility period has expired, sending notification to Central Archives prior to destruction ([form 1603](#) in the Multiservice Assistant).

**Note that destruction may take place only after validation by the Head of Central Archives.**

## 5.3 Permanent archives: long-term preservation

### Definition

These are files whose administrative utility period expires and which must be transferred to the archives for definitive conservation.

They are of historical interest or necessary to manage and justify the rights of physical or legal persons.

### Storage site

Pending introduction of the Records management system, these archives are to be kept in Public Folders.

**Recommendations**

Delete copies of the same item stored on P: drives, in Public Folders and different shared areas so that only the original is kept.

Organise files into directories and sub-directories using the same filing system as their paper equivalent to make both searching and sorting easier.

Transfer permanent archives to Public Folders pending introduction of the RMS.

If your entity uses the Records Management System, preservation is managed by that system and you are alerted if any action is required.

## 6. Appendices

### 6.1 Appendix 1: Sorting intermediate paper and electronic archives. Check-list:

- Check the administrative utility period or retention period of files/records in the Retention/Disposal schedule
- Remove any out-of-date items, duplicates etc from the files whose administrative utility period or retention period is ongoing
- Transfer:
  - **Paper archives** to Central Archives ([form 1601](#)) or directly to the basement in the Agora building
  - **Electronic archives** to the Records management system or the corresponding Public Folder directories if the tool has not yet been deployed within the entity
- Send Central Archives notification of the intended destruction of files declared for weeding out and whose administrative utility period has expired
- Destroy the files only after receiving authorisation from Central Archives.

### 6.2 Appendix 2: Sorting historical paper and electronic archives. Check-list

- Check the administrative utility period or retention period in the Retention/Disposal schedule
- Eliminate the items of no historical importance (see Appendix 5: Discardable documents)
- Destroy duplicates
- Remove paper clips, plastic sleeves and elastic bands
- Fill in a request to deposit your paper archives using [form 1600](#)
- Deposit the paper archives in Central Archives
- Transfer your files to the Records management system or the corresponding Public Folder directories if the tool has not yet been deployed within the entity

### 6.3 Appendix 3: Retention/Disposal schedule

Your retention/disposal schedule is drawn up by agreement between your department and Central Archives and makes it possible to determine, for each set of documents, the retention period and the final action to be taken upon expiry of that period: destruction or permanent preservation.

#### Example of a retention/disposal schedule:

Series: title, description	Retention period			Final action		Notes / Rationale	Folder structure
	copy	format & storage	period	Disposal	classification		
<b>Development of information management policies, strategies and procedures</b>							
<b>CoE information management policies and procedures</b> Policies and procedures that address the whole CoE and potentially all staff such as archival policies and procedures, collection policy, records management policy, instructions for document referencing, weeding, move procedures, access to information policies etc.	Master	Digital: PF	Permanent	Review of retention	Public	The current mode of policy accumulation might be changed to policy replacement.	By policy/ procedure
	Copy	HTML, PDF: WCD (Admin Handbook)	Keep as long as policy and procedures are in force.	Destruction			
<b>Policies and strategies guiding information management</b> Policies and strategies that address those responsible for the management of information, concerning issues such as digital preservation, archives security or description policy and procedures.	Master	Digital: PF	Keep 1 year after expiration or replacement of policy/strategy	Review for conservation of outdated policies for later reference	Public		By policy/strategy
<b>Information management policy development documentation</b> Documents related to elaboration, research and consultation in developing or revising information management policies including draft versions, exchange with stakeholders and approvals.	Master	Word, E-mail; collaborative site (AC collab, eRoom, etc.)	5 years after publication of final text	Destruction	Internal		By policy/ strategy/ procedure

### 6.4 Appendix 4: The Council's in-house regulations on archiving

Certain types of document require **special archiving** defined in regulatory texts listed below.

#### A. Purchasing

>> [Archiving of files \(contracts/orders\) and documentary proof](#)

In: ADMIN/GEN (2012)7: Guide to Good Practice - Purchasing § IV, 6

#### B. Contracts

>> [Consultants' contracts](#)

Archiving of information pertaining to contracts

In: INSTRUCTION no. 59, article 24, of 21 December 2007 on consultants' contracts

>> [Outsourcing contracts](#)

Archiving of information pertaining to contracts

In: INSTRUCTION no. 60 Article 26, of 21 December 2007 on outsourcing contracts.

### C. Accounting records

>> [Accounting](#)

In: FINANCIAL REGULATIONS AND SUPPLEMENTARY PROVISIONS  
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE, part 4, article 68

"All accounting records shall be conserved for a period of **ten years**."

In addition, documents bearing one or more signatures must be conserved in paper form.

### D. Personal files: access

[RULE no. 1238](#) of 14 December 2006 on access to a staff member's personal administrative file

[Regulation](#) outlining a data protection system for personal data files in the Council of Europe  
(Particularly article 2)

**CM/Del/Dec(89)425/59b** 11 April 1989

## 6.5 Appendix 5: Discardable documents

This list is given as an example and is not exhaustive.

Documents	Examples	Exceptions
Duplicates, multiple copies  Carefully check what is thought to be a <b>duplicate</b> before discarding it, to avoid deleting the only copy		
Informal or incomplete notes	In incomplete form (no date or author)	
Notes made prior to the production of a document		
Rough drafts		
Unneeded reference material		
Documents of passing interest		
Manuscript versions of published documents		Except if the published version has been heavily modified
Copies of examination marking		
External documentation, out-of-date, produced by other departments or organisations, which is no use for opening and investigating a case	reports, brochures, leaflets etc	Documents closely linked with the files they record
Routine correspondence	Meeting convocations; changes of address; invitations; letters of thanks; reservations; requests for brochures or catalogues; information requests etc.	
Forwarding mail		
Envelopes		Annotated envelopes
Blank forms		
Routine administrative documents	maintenance requests; leave requests; training files etc.	
Memoranda	Lists of public holidays and other days off etc.	
Prospectuses	Advertising, promotions etc	

## 6.6 Appendix 6: Form for temporary records preservation

To transfer records, complete this form and send it via the Multiservice Assistant to Central Archives for authorisation

Central Archives

Tel.: 03 90 2143 77

E-mail: [archives@coe.int](mailto:archives@coe.int)

Website: [www.coe.int/archives](http://www.coe.int/archives)

<b>Directorate</b> (DGHL, DGIII etc)						
<b>Division</b>						
<b>Contact person</b>					<b>Tel.</b>	
<b>Quantity</b>						
<b>Dates covered</b> (e.g. 1980-1984)						
<b>To keep</b>	5 years		10 years		20 years	

### **TRANSFER AUTHORISATION**

Name of the administrator responsible	
Signature	
Date	

### **ARCHIVES USE ONLY**

Accession number	
Date received	
Visa of Head of the Information Management Division	
Name	
Shelf number	

Form for temporary preservation of documents, 2009 version

### **Notes**

- Before sending documents please contact the Council of Europe's Central Archives using the Multiservice Assistant and await a deposit authorisation
- Enclose that form with your dispatch
- Each file or folder must be numbered, have a title and indicate the period it covers
- The slip must be accompanied by an inventory indicating the numbers, titles and years covered by the files to be sent

- The World version of this inventory must be attached to the Multiservice Assistant form

**How to attach the form to your request via the Multiservice Assistant**

- Save the completed form on your local hard drive
- Submit your request
- Access your request again
- Click on "Modify"
- Attach the form using the "Browse" button
- Submit your request again

## Example

Numbers	Titles	Dates
1	Director's correspondence	1997-1999
2	5th ministerial conference	1992

- If you wish to send referenced documents, please check first that these documents are not already present in our collection using the following link: [WebCAT](#)

A copy of this form will be sent to you once your deposit has been processed. Please keep it in a safe place, as you will need it for future requests concerning this deposit.



## 6.7 Appendix 7: Form for permanent preservation of documents

For the depositing in archives of files to be preserved indefinitely, please fill in this form and send it via the Multiservice Assistant to the Council of Europe's Central Archives for prior agreement.

Central Archives

Tel.: 03 90 2143 77

E-mail: [archives@coe.int](mailto:archives@coe.int)

Website: [www.coe.int/archives](http://www.coe.int/archives)

<b>Directorate</b> (DGHL/DGIII ...)			
<b>Division</b>			
<b>Contact person</b>		<b>Tel.</b>	
<b>Quantity</b>			
<b>Dates covered</b> (e.g. 1980-1984)			
<b>To keep</b>	<b>Indefinitely</b>		

### **DEPOSIT AUTHORISATION**

Name of the administrator responsible	
Signature	
Date	

### **ARCHIVES USE ONLY**

Accession number	
Date received	
Visa of Head of the Information Information Management Division	
Name	
Shelf mark	

Form for permanent preservation of documents, 2009 version

### **Notes**

- Before sending documents please contact the Council of Europe's Central Archives using the Multiservice Assistant and await a deposit authorisation
- Enclose that slip with your dispatch
- Each file or folder must be numbered, have a title and indicate the period it covers

- Your slip must be accompanied by an inventory indicating the numbers, titles and years covered by the files to be sent
- The Word version of this inventory must be attached to the Multiservice Assistant form

#### **How to attach the form to your request via the Multiservice Assistant**

- Save the completed form on your local hard drive
- Submit your request
- Access your request again
- Click on "Modify"
- Attach the form using the "Browse" button
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Example

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If you wish to send referenced documents, please check first that these documents are not already present in our collection using the following link: [WebCAT](#)

A copy of this form will be sent to you once your deposit has been processed. Please keep it in a safe place, as you will need it for future requests concerning this deposit.

#### **6.8 Appendix 8: Notification of destruction**

Using the Multiservice Assistant, notify Central Archives of the documents to be destroyed in accordance with the document lifespans defined in your entity's retention/disposal schedule. Documents may be destroyed only after the head of archives has validated the request.

Central Archives

Tel.: 03 90 21 43 77

E-mail: [archives@coe.int](mailto:archives@coe.int)

Website: [www.coe.int/archives](http://www.coe.int/archives)

<b>Directorate</b> (DGHL/DGIII ...)	
<b>Division</b>	
<b>Type of documents</b>	
<b>Quantity</b>	
<b>Dates covered</b> (e.g. 1980-1984)	
<b>Observations</b>	

***DESTRUCTION AUTHORISATION***

Administrator responsible			
Signature		Date	
Archives correspondent			
Signature		Date	

Notification of destruction of documents, 2009 version

### Notes

Your form should be accompanied by a list giving the numbers, titles and years covered of the files to be destroyed

### How to attach the form to your request through the Multiservice Assistant

- Save the completed form on your local hard drive
- Submit your request
- Access your request again
- Click on "Modify"
- Attach the form using the "Browse" button
- Submit your request again

### Example

Numbers	Titles	Dates
1	Director's correspondence	1997-1999
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