Essential Records: Now where did I put that!?

A few weeks ago, COOP Chat discussed the importance of defining your organization's mission essential functions (MEFs). Defining these early on in the COOP process is critical because they inform key elements of the continuity plan. These key elements include alternate facilities, resource dependencies, IT infrastructure needs and essential records. This week's COOP chat will focus on the latter; Essential Records.

How many times have you been in a hurry in the mornings, running late or just out of sorts, and you can't find your keys? They aren't where you usually leave them. You may not even remember when you last had them. Did you lock them in the car? How can something so important be so difficult to find when you need it the most? This same scenario frequently unfolds during a disaster or other disruptive event, except often what you can't seem to find are the records needed to keep your operations up and running. These are your Essential Records and the ability to find them quickly amidst chaos is why they are a key element to your continuity planning.

Essential records should relate directly to, and support, your MEFs. This generally means only a small percentage of your records overall would be considered essential. Essential records should include your continuity plan, staff contact information, access to databases, and financial/payroll records. You should be able to access these records within minutes or hours after an event. You shouldn't have to run around looking for records or spend valuable time going through endless files to find the one thing you need.

Some questions to ask when identifying your essential records:
- Where is the information and how do I access it?
- What happens if our network is down?
- Do I have records that other partners or agencies might need?
- Do I have records that the public needs in an emergency?
- What do I need immediately vs. what can wait a few days or a few weeks?

This task may seem daunting which is why Records Management will be on hand during the development of continuity plans and throughout the upcoming COOP Program workshops and work session events. They will be available to guide you through the process of identifying your essential records, making sure you have access to them during an emergency, and protecting them well into the future. Now, if only finding your keys were that easy.

If you need more information you can contact Amy Rasmussen. Her information and more details regarding COOP can be found on the Emergency Management website.

Remember - it's always better to be COOPed up together!

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