

NOTE ON THE MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR A RECORDS ROOM

1. Introductory

Section 5(2) of the Public Records Act, 1993 stipulates that “every records creating agency may set up such number of record room in such places as it deems fit and shall place each record room under the charge of a records officer”. The survey and inspection conducted by National Archives of India from time to time have revealed that the state of maintenance and preservation of records in various records creating agencies is far from satisfactory. They need to take adequate measures to ensure their proper upkeep and longevity of the records.

1.1 The present note, therefore, marks out the basic requirements that are essential for safe housing of the semi-current and non-current records in the Records Rooms.

1.2 The salient features delineated below are primarily meant for those Records Rooms that are to be organised in the existing accommodation. While planning for the new office buildings providing for an adequately well-equipped Records Room, the standards laid down by the Bureau of Indian Standards in “IS 2663:1989 Design of buildings for archives-Recommendations relating to its primary elements (Second revision) (Reaffirmed Feb. 2011) may be followed.

2. Records Room

2.1 A separate Records Room/stack Area is a vital necessity for all the Records Creating Agencies. A Records Room should, as far as possible, be located on the ground floor of a building. If its windows open into the space outside or in the courtyards in the interior, they should be fitted with metal grills and wire mesh nets. To avoid splashing of rain-water in the room, rain shades should be provided at all their openings. For reasons of safety of records and security, it is advisable to permit limited entry into such rooms.

2.2 The floor of a Records Room should be such as to permit easy movement of records.

2.3 Where accommodation and design so permits, the records-area, the record reference and the reception portions should be separate.

3. Drainage

3.1 While selecting the location of the Records Room, it may be ensured that no water pipes or drains pass near, above, or under the Records Room building. Further, in order to prevent any inflow of water in the Records Room due to blockage of drains or accidental damage to water pipes in the building, its floor level should be raised a few centimeters above the general level of the other floors of the building.

4. Air-conditioning

4.1 Storage of records in an air-conditioned atmosphere is conducive to their longevity, Air-

conditioning is, therefore, essential for Records Rooms. In existing buildings, which do not have central air-conditioning, use of split type air-conditioner or window split type air-conditioner is recommended.

4.2 For effective air-conditioning, ventilation should be so planned as to permit minimum leakage of the conditioned atmosphere. While calculating conditioning load, bulk of shelving equipment, archival material, the number of persons sitting in the Records Room, the bulk of records moving in and out, and the lighting wattage should be taken into account.

4.3 Humidity and temperature in conditioned Records Room should be measured regularly. The ambient conditions for storage of records are (i) temperature 22°C-25°C and (ii) relative humidity $45 \pm 5\%$.

4.4 In order to maintain proper humidity control in the conditioned area, it is necessary that permeation of dampness through the walls or floors does not take place. The floor should be laid waterproof and the walls should be coated with waterproof oil paint.

4.5 While planning for the air-conditioning for the Records Rooms, it may be ensured that the air-conditioning plant has to provide round the clock air-conditioning all through the year. Such running of plant could lead to occasional service breakdown. Hence a provision for a stand by plant may also have to be made, lest such breakdowns create conditions which might lead to accelerated damage to records.

5. Non-conditioned Area

5.1 Keeping in view economy in resources, in many cases it may not be possible to get Records Room air-conditioned. In such a case step should be taken to provide proper circulation of air in the storage room by providing air-circulators, fans and exhaust fans to counteract the effect of high humidity, and prevent formation of pockets of stagnant air in the storage room. Use of chemicals, like Anhydrous, silica gel (self indicating) or in enamelled or glazed earthen pots, help to reduce humidity in the room. Mechanical dehumidifiers can also be used during rains to check the deleterious influence of excessively humid climate.

5.2 Temperature in Records Room can be kept within reasonable range by choosing such rooms that are located in the interiors or have a verandah around them. During summer, the Records Room should be fitted with air-circulators, electric fans and exhaust fans for proper circulation of air, so that high temperature can be brought down. Care should be taken to see that direct sunlight does not fall on the records. This can be achieved by fitting either tinted glass-panes or heat resistant glass panes on the windows and by providing curtains.

6. Shelving

6.1 Shelving in a Records Room should be such which is simple in design, durable, easy to clean, offering maximum protection to records against fire and ensuring maximum facility and convenience for servicing of records.

6.2 Shelves should be fixed away from the walls on upright fixers and at equi-distance throughout the storage. Distance between successive shelf rows may be 0.7 m to 1.0 m or in accordance with the requirement laid down in “IS: 2663-1989 Code of Practice for the Basic Elements in the Design of Buildings for Archives”. Distance between successive rows (shelf height) and depth of shelves may depend on dimensions of records/files and the manner of keeping record series on them. A perusal of the Indian standards referred to above will be helpful.

6.3 If steel shelving is provided in the Records Room, it should be painted rustproof. The paint should be stable and non-injurious to documents. Steel shelves may preferably be slotted for vertical free circulation of air. Where wooden shelves are provided, the wood should be protected against termite infestation. Sharp edges and corners in the shelves and supports which can result in physical damage to documents, should be rounded off.

6.4 Mobile storage systems, like Compactus shelving can also be installed in the records room which provides maximum amount of storage capacity. These can be fitted with a variety of accessories. To access stored information, the mobile shelving can be moved effortlessly using hand wheel and can be locked for extra protection. The advantage of such type of shelving is that it is economical and space saving, it ensures good protection of the documentary wealth against dust and sunlight. Another advantage is that the stack area can be converted into a security area as the mode is lockable. But installation of such system increases load on the floor and therefore load bearing capacity of the building may be taken in to account before installation.

7. Storage

7.1 Collections in Records Room differ in bulk, size and shape and commonly consist of bound volumes, loose sheets, files, manuscripts, maps, charts, plans & drawings etc. Shelving arrangement required for specific materials need designing according to the nature, shape and bulk of the material. While designing these shelves, it may be ensured that neither these nor materials kept on them touch either the walls, ceilings or floor. The distance from wall, ceiling and floor should be at least 15 cm.

7.2 The records should be kept loosely packed on the shelves with sufficient space in between, so as to enable free circulation of air and to prevent formation of pockets of high humidity. Unbound records may either be tied between 2 pieces of 5 ply boards or kept in carton boxes made of quality material.

7.3 For proper servicing of records from upper shelves stepladders or platform type ladders may be used.

7.4 For safeguarding the records against damage due to insect infestation, the Records Room should be sprayed with insecticide solutions beneath the shelved, behind the cabinets and also in corners etc. All cracks in the floor and walls should be filled up to deny any hiding place to pests. Use of spray guns or pressure guns or any other similar equipment can be made. However, only those chemicals should be sprayed whose effect on the durability and permanency of paper

and other record components has been properly studied.

7.5 In a non-conditioned area, use of preservatives like naphthalene in the form of balls tied in meshed cloth or bricks kept on shelves helps to keep the records safe from insects. The insecticide formulations like Flit and other related insecticides are effective.

7.6 Much damage to record is usually done by rodents. Whereas it is desirable to prevent their entry into the Records Room by using proper wire-mesh at the outlet drains, a few rat-traps should be kept handy for eliminating their menace in case of their entry in the Records Room. Neither eatables nor smoking, nor naked flame should be allowed in the storage area.

7.7 At the first sign of rise in humidity in the Records Room preventive action should be initiated. Also, advice of institutions like the National Archives of India, New Delhi, should invariably be sought in case any insect infestation or fungus growth is noticed or detected.

7.8 In spite of dust-proof buildings and air-conditioning, dust does find its way to the stored materials. Regular dusting operation in the storage area with the help of a vacuum cleaner is, therefore, desirable to remove dust from the stored material. The Records Room itself should also be kept absolutely clean. Staff engaged in dusting should be provided with dust respirators. A cloth bag with surgical lining that can be changed occasionally, works as a satisfactory respirator.

8. Lighting

8.1 Good lighting with either natural or artificial light is necessary for every Records Room. Modern lighting practice is to provide defused lights of varying intensity for different rooms. Lighting can be improved by using paints that reflect light.

9. Fire Fighting Arrangements

9.1 To protect records against any accidental fire, all electric wiring should be through conduit pipes and the main control switches of lights etc. installed in the Storage area should be located outside the Records Room. As far as possible the Records Rooms should be made fire resistant. In big Records Rooms the storage space should be divided into separate fire resistant compartments.

Additional automatic dampers should be installed in the centrally air-conditioned areas so that ducts could be immediately closed in case of fire, thereby preventing the spread of fire to other compartments. It is advisable to provide emergency exits, besides the main entry door to the Records Room to remove valuable archival material to safety, when necessary. Every Records Room should be fitted with a fire detection alarm system to detect any fire in the storage area. Use Of naked light, heaters and smoking in the room should be prohibited. As a preventive measure against accidental fires, all light and power circuits should be switched off after office hours. Watch and Ward staff provided for this area may use torches, if necessary.

Use of temporary lights, loose and ordinary flexible wire for fans, air-circulators and other

electrical appliances for the repository should be avoided and instead 'Workshop Braded and Armoured' flexible wire should be used. Electrical appliances and fittings in the repository should be periodically checked for loose connections and defects rectified. In this connection, detailed instructions laid down in "IS: 1642 - 1989 Code of Practice for Fire Safety of Buildings (General) - Details of Construction (first Revision)(Reaffirmed Nov. 2010)", "IS: 11460 - 1985 Code of Practice for Fire Safety of Libraries and Archives Buildings (Reaffirmed 2010)" may be followed.

9.2 For combating fires, adequate equipment of carbon dioxide (CO₂) type should be provided at suitable places in the Records Room for easy accessibility. Besides, water pipes and hoses should be installed at convenient points to fight any major conflagration.

9.3 All the equipments for either detecting of fire or combating of fire should be checked at regular intervals to ensure that they are in active operative state. Similarly, staff connected with the storage of records should be trained in fire fighting. A fire drill may be arranged at least once in two months to keep the trained staff alert.

9.4 Instructions regarding prevention of fire and fire fighting should be prominently displayed in the Records Room. Likewise telephone numbers of Fire Service Station should also be prominently displayed at a central place in the Records Room. It will help seeking quick aid of the expert fire fighting agencies, whenever exigencies so demand.

10. Conclusion

10.1 To sum up, good house keeping, creation of hygienic conditions, proper breathing environment, combined with constant staff vigilance would facilitate maintenance of records in healthy state and for prolonging their life. The overall responsibility of the records room should be entrusted to the Records Officer nominated as envisaged under sub section 1 of section 5 of the Public Records Act,1993.

So far as the digital records are concerned, as per the provisions of para 97 of the Central Secretariat Manual of e-office Procedure, (1st –ed.,2012) issued by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances(DARPG), the archiving of digital records i.e. disposed/closed e-files and correspondence have to be taken at regular intervals. Two copies of the archived digital records have to be maintained- one with the **Data Centre/Digital Record Room** to be set up as part of e-Office and the other at the location of Disaster Recovery Site. This will be the responsibility of NIC/NAI/any other agency designated by the Government. However guidelines in respect of Digital Record Room are yet to be framed.