

## ***"To Everything... There is a Season"***

Since the Electronic Records Guidelines were distributed, a number of calls came in to the office with questions like "So now I can just put everything on a CD" or "You are abandoning microfilm?" or "I didn't like paper anyway". Unfortunately, everything is not that easy. Electronic Records will be a great boom for some but a nightmare for others if the wrong choices are made. Electronic Records are not a panacea. There is a reason and a time to use paper, just as there is a reason and a time to use microfilm or electronic media. Making the wrong choice can be costly in both a monetary and legal sense. **Following are some tips:**

### **Reasons to use Paper (Advantages):**

Paper is a familiar record. Handling paper has a small learning curve. You don't need to purchase any special equipment to read it. Images are not alterable. Paper is best for document with low retrieval rates and for documents with a short term life (0-6 years).

### **Disadvantages to Paper:**

Using paper is labor intensive and bulky. Paper deteriorates rapidly with use and is easily lost. Duplication of a paper record lowers the quality of the record.

### **Reasons to use Microfilm (Advantages):**

Microfilm is durable and has long term stability. It is compact and useable with a wide variety of documents. Microfilm images are not able to be altered and can be used as an archival back up or as a security copy in the event of a disaster. Microfilm is especially useful for storing information that needs to be kept for long periods of time.

### **Disadvantages to Microfilm:**

Equipment to read and print microforms can be expensive, bulky and specialized. Microfilm can be difficult to search and can be annoying to handle and read. Microfilm requires quality control procedures which can be time consuming.

### **Reasons to use Electronic Formats (Advantages):**

Electronic Records are easy to duplicate and distribute. More than one person can look at the same record at the same time. Searching can be quick and easy. Images can be enhanced or magnified for better viewing. Electronic Records are most useful for records that are frequently used and have a short term shelf life.

### **Disadvantages to Electronic Formats:**

Quality control requires special procedures. Electronic records are not "eye-legible". In other words, if the electronic system goes down, records cannot be read. Requires expensive equipment for retrieval (terminals, servers, etc.). Requires specialized training for input, maintenance and retrieval. Conversion and migration costs can be expensive.