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There are many legislative and regulatory requirements for a facility manager to keep records. Activities such as water treatment, risk assessments and waste transfers must be properly recorded and retained for future reference by enforcing bodies or investigators. Maintenance log books, service records, portable appliance testing, and accident books all contain critical information that must be retained to support any future investigation.

In addition to these mandatory records most organisations have document retention policies which specify what information must be retained, how long for and how it should eventually be disposed of. Such policies are important, not only to avoid the disposal of information which may be required at some future date but also to reduce the burden of unnecessary storage of vast amounts of data and documents which the space challenged facility manager will have to find space to archive.

A document retention policy is only as good as its implementation. It needs to be rigorously enforced from top down with staff educated about not only the policy and the benefits of compliance but also the implications of not following it and the risks of non-compliance.

Facilities management is made up of thousands of individual dealings with suppliers, landlords, consultants and a host of others. The financial, compliance and service risks involved with each of these transactions render it sensible to keep records for an appropriate length of time. An inability to access information about an earlier request, problem or dispute can prove costly in both financial and reputation terms.

This approach can be useful when personnel changes occur in the facilities management team. A new appointment to an FM role will find themselves very grateful to the previous incumbent if they inherit a good set of records detailing the history, agreements and changes implemented for each building, tenant or contractor.

Record keeping also facilitates the creation of useful management information enabling a proactive facility manager to spot trends and identify improvement opportunities. Useful statistics such as mean-time-between-failure or customer satisfaction indices rely entirely on robust historic data to be of use in driving continuous improvement.

Good record keeping is essential to every business, especially as society appears to grow ever more litigious. Failure to retain a document that is later needed could prove very costly to your business, so always err on the side of caution when deciding which documents to retain especially as electronic storage grows cheaper by the day.

The Information Commissioner's Office provides useful guidance on record retention with reference to the Data Protection Act, Freedom of Information Act and Environmental Information Regulations www.ico.gov.uk