

Where Does All That E-mail Go – and How Long Is It Kept?

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updated December 2, 2010

Below is some clarifying information about the State's e-mail system and record-keeping practices.

It is important to understand that the State's e-mails are stored at 3 "levels" depending on their age and need for instant access:

1. **Active** e-mail is kept in the individual user's account on the Microsoft Exchange servers, using Outlook as their desktop software. These e-mails are all on disk, and can be searched using Outlook's "find" or "advanced find" features.
2. **Inactive e-mail** is transferred by the individual user to archive folders called ".PST" files. These archived e-mails are stored on disk either on the individual's space on the file server or on their PC local drive. These e-mails also are all on disk, and can be searched using Outlook's "find" or "advanced find" features.
3. **E-mail that has been deleted** (not in the first 2 levels above) can be restored from the backup tapes, back to August 2006. However, because these are backup tapes, primarily for disaster recovery purposes, they are not able to be used directly with Outlook. They have to be "restored" (converted) from streaming tape back into files on disk, so they can be accessed, and potentially searched. The tapes are stored at a warehouse in Portland, and would have to be retrieved, restored/ converted, then turned over to the agency for access and searching. It takes a specially-trained technician about 2 hours per tape to do this conversion. The Office of Information Technology (OIT) technician's labor effort is about 2 hours to restore each tape. At \$22 an hour that would be \$44 per tape. For Freedom of Access Act (FOAA) requests, restoring e-mail from the disaster recovery backup tapes is considered a "translation" cost, above the \$10 per hour cost for searches. See:

<http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/statutes/1/title1sec408.html> (specifically 3.C., below):

C. If translation is necessary, the agency or official may charge a fee to cover the actual cost of translation. [2003, c. 709, §2 (NEW).]

However, if e-mail has not been deleted, but is still on disk (either as active e-mail or in .PST archive folders), there is no need to go to level 3 at all. Therefore, there would be no OIT charge for restoring the backup tapes. If e-mail is still on disk, the agency user can search their e-mails using Outlook's "find" and "advanced find" features. Searches can be done by name of sender, by subject, by date, or by any key word within the subject or text body of the e-mail message.

How long are government records (including e-mail kept)? The State's General Schedules for records states how long each type of record is supposed to be kept by the agencies. For example, "general correspondence" is to be kept 3 years; then destroyed, per the approved schedules. Other types of records are kept for various time periods,

some as little as 60 days, and others as long as 60 years, as shown in the tables at:
<http://www.maine.gov/sos/arc/records/state/gensched2.html> .

Because of retention schedules (approved by the State Archives), requests for information that go many years back in time either can't be fulfilled, or would be expensive to restore from tape (only back to August 2006 is available, at \$44 per tape). More recent e-mails are generally in the agencies' active e-mail files or in their archive (.PST) files, which are on disk, and can be found using Outlook's "find" and "advanced find" features. Only in the case where e-mails have been deleted is there a charge for tape restore (\$44 per tape, for each night that needs to be restored as a snapshot of the individual's e-mail account on that date).

If this step is necessary, the labor effort is about 2 hours per tape, as a billable charge to the agency of \$44 per tape. There is a backup tape for each night (Monday – Friday). So, if only 1 tape is needed, the OIT charge would be \$44. If a week's worth is needed, the OIT charge would be \$220 for 5 tapes. If a year's worth of tape backup restores are needed, the charge would be \$11,440 for 260 tapes. When these long time periods are requested, OIT recommends either narrowing the time period, or doing a "snapshot" of the time period, such as a tape for a particular month, rather than every night's tape for the entire period. This way, the information request may be "reasonably" fulfilled with much fewer tape restores needed, and therefore much less expensive.

Again, the first preference is to try to satisfy the information request with e-mail that still exists on tape (level 1 and 2) rather than resorting to the last step (recovering deleted e-mails from the disaster recovery backup tapes).