



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted this audit to address a congressional inquiry into EPA records management policies and practices for preserving text messages as federal records.

The National Archives and Records Administration considers electronic messages, including text messages, to be federal records when created or received in the course of agency business. Federal agencies must adhere to federal records management laws to manage and preserve these electronic messages.

This report addresses the following EPA goal or cross-agency strategy:

- *Embracing EPA as a high-performing organization.*

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Congressionally Requested Audit: EPA Needs to Improve Processes for Preserving Text Messages as Federal Records

What We Found

We did not find instances where the EPA used text messaging to intentionally circumvent the Federal Records Act. We found that the EPA implemented policies and procedures for preserving text messages, and took steps to make employees aware of the updated records management policy. However, management attention is still needed for the EPA's records management and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) practices. In particular, the EPA needs to strengthen management controls over:

Insufficient practices for preserving text messages could lead to noncompliance with the Federal Records Act and FOIA requirements.

- Documenting procedures for responding to congressional requests.
- Providing instructions to employees responding to FOIA requests on what to search (in particular, government-issued mobile devices) when a FOIA request is submitted to the EPA.
- Preserving non-transitory text message records before mobile devices are replaced or before text messages are deleted from the mobile device.

In addition, we found that the EPA's mobile device management processes do not prevent employees from changing the device's configuration settings for retaining text messages on all government-issued mobile devices.

Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We recommend that the EPA Deputy Administrator require the agency to document formal procedures for responding to congressional requests for records. We recommend that the Office of Environmental Information remind employees that, as appropriate, all text messages potentially responsive to a FOIA or congressional request must be available for inclusion in searches conducted by the agency. We also recommended that the Office of Environmental Information determine whether potential text message records were lost during the replacement of a mobile device, implement a strategy to instruct employees not to change text message retention settings on mobile devices, develop a plan to replace mobile devices, and formalize a plan to conduct market research on managing text message communications.

The EPA either agreed with our recommendations or agreed to take sufficient corrective actions, and we consider all recommendations resolved pending completion of corrective actions.