

## IMPROVED HEALTH FOR YOUR HEALTH DEPARTMENT'S FILING SYSTEM

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### ABSTRACT

Poor management of filing systems has become a costly inconvenience to many operating offices. The Johnson County, Iowa, Health Department has adopted a new filing system which eliminates the problem of lost records. Consideration is given to drawer crowding, size and weight of folders, labeling of folders, and how much is filed in each. The scheme of arrangement provides index headings common to the user, and easily identifiable color coded index tabs for all primary and secondary guides and folders. In addition, a cross reference index provides easy location of materials. The system now functions satisfactorily, but only time can indicate the trouble spots.

"Where is that letter? I know I filed it in this drawer very carefully so that I could find it quickly!" Tempers often flare, embarrassing moments occur, and valuable time is wasted searching through files for a misfiled record. A survey by Records Control, Inc. shows that from 1 to 5% of records are being misfiled and one-half of the misfiled records are never found (4). After a 7-year study of our nation's companies, savings and loan associations, banks, etc. Industrial Psychology, Inc. has calculated the cost of a misfiled letter or record to be \$61.23 (4). The point of the problem is often management indifference (2) which probably is why managers sometimes fail to take the responsibility to secure and properly supervise skilled clerical employees (3). Managers and executive must be made aware of the high cost of clerical errors to do something about the problem.

Officers of Health Departments are not magically immune to misfiled letters and poorly organized filing systems or non-systems. The Johnson County, Iowa, Health Department in 1970 was a victim of such a non-system. The purpose of this paper is to show what was done to correct the problem.

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### THE REORGANIZATION PROCESS

Several mornings were spent studying the organization of the files. "In revising a system you must know how the present system works and what its weaknesses are." (4)<sup>3</sup> At the same time, a review of the different types of filing was made. Principal references included, *Progressive Filing and Records Management* and *How to Appraise Files in 60 Seconds* (2). Following is a list of questions considered.

- (a) Are the drawers crowded?
- (b) Are all the folders uniform in size and weight?
- (c) Is there a scheme of arrangement?
- (d) How are the file folders labeled (typed or handwritten)?
- (e) How much material is filed in each folder?  
(2)

While examining the files, minor changes were made—scrap pieces of paper were removed, papers that were clipped together were stapled, file folders were turned into proper position, papers had to be straightened out or turned so all would be facing in the same direction, and misfiled records were properly filed.

The Health Department is engaged in numerous activities and programs as can be seen by the list given in the project section. Because of the large amount of records required for just one program or activity, there are separate file drawers for milk and milk products, restaurants and food service establishments, trailer parks and mobile homes, schools, administrative activities, etc. These alphabetic files seemed to be working well and thus were left intact. The filing of nuisance investigations and project activities seemed to be the big problems.

Although there was some semblance of subject filing in the old system, it was ineffective. The trouble appeared to be one of categorizing subjects in some kind of order. Categorizing was done by using the list of sanitation activities and programs.

At this point, a filing truism was put into efficient use. "With 'subject' indexing, select words for the thesaurus which already are common to the users of the files" (1). An example of this is "weeds" was used instead of "noxious weeds."

The new system was adopted and revisions were made while files were being transferred. At this time the basics of proper filing procedures were performed. In many instances records were coded which had never been coded before. The final list of main divisions (primary guides) and subheadings (secondary guides and folders) that was developed is found in the project section, Table 1. To differentiate between the guides, red tabs were used for the primary guides and green tabs for the secondary guides.

From the list of main divisions and subheadings, a relative index was prepared on 3 inch × 5 inch index cards which served as a cross reference. Also a list of the filing procedures was prepared to serve as a reminder to the secretary of the steps that must be followed for subject filing to be functional.

The filing system which was employed is adopted to the situation in the Johnson County, Iowa Health Department. But "no one system is universal" (1). The system may have to be modified to suit different Health Departments with special problems.

"Bugs" or trouble in a system may not appear immediately after adoption of the new system. "Bugs" may not appear for months or years. The test of the effectiveness of the system is when a record has to be retrieved from the files. How quickly can this be performed? The secretary who worked with the new system, for a period of time, indicated that the system seems to be functioning satisfactorily. Time will tell the true story.

TABLE 1. LIST OF SANITATION ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS

*ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIVITIES*

Control of labeling and advertising  
Correspondence  
Enforcement; laws, ordinances, regulations  
Formulate rules and regulations  
Inter-agency programs  
Inter-departmental coordination  
Inter-state programs  
Licensing  
Record keeping and reports  
Responsibility for sanitation programs  
Sanitation program evaluation  
Supervision of personnel

*AIR POLLUTION*

Commercial  
Governmental  
Industrial  
Public  
Sampling

Solid waste  
Transportation

*DRUGS*

Cosmetics  
Drug mfg. firms  
Drug storage  
Retail drugs-compounding  
Retail drug outlets (bulk)  
Therapeutic devices

*FOOD PREPARATION AND SERVICE*

Catering points—airports, etc.  
Eating and drinking establishments  
Factory cafeterias  
Fairs and carnivals  
Food handler training courses  
Itinerant service stands  
School lunch programs  
Swab sample exams  
Vending machine sanitation

*FOOD STORES AND PROCESSING*

Bakeries  
Bottling plants: milk, soda pop, etc.  
Candy factories  
Canning factories  
Coffee packaging  
Confectionaries  
Dried fruits  
Flour mills  
Food warehouses  
Fruit stands  
Grocery stores  
Honey processing plants  
Ice and ice plant sanitation  
Rice and other cereals  
Sugar factories  
Tobacco warehousing

*GARBAGE DISPOSAL and VECTOR CONTROL*

Community sanitary surveys  
Disposal of dead animals  
Garbage storage, collection, disposal  
Livestock sanitation  
Nuisance control  
Poultry sanitation  
Radioactive waste disposal  
Vector control:  
Bed-bug, cockroach, flea, fly,  
Mosquito, rat, etc.  
Insecticides  
Rodenticides  
Supplies  
Controls

*HOUSING AND BUILDING*

Airport sanitation—stations and planes  
Boarding homes and institutions  
Bus and depot sanitation  
Camps for migratory workers  
Comfort stations—mobile and stationary  
Commercial establishments, service stations, etc.  
Day care centers,  
Fraternity and sorority houses  
Hospital sanitation  
Hotels and motels  
Housing sanitation and slum clearance  
Industrial hygiene sanitation (Occupational hygiene)  
Labor and construction camps  
Mobile home sanitation  
Nursing homes

Professional offices  
 Public building, jails, etc.  
 Railway sanitation—stations and trains  
 School buildings and grounds  
 Scout camps  
 Ship and vessel sanitation—including docks and warehouses  
 Trailer courts and tourist parks

**MEAT AND MEAT PRODUCTS**

Eggs including egg breaking plants  
 Fish processing plants (seafood)  
 Meat processing plants  
 Meat storage and curing  
 Poultry plant inspection  
 Refrigerated locker plants  
 Rendering plant sanitation  
 Slaughter houses and abattoirs

**MILK AND MILK PRODUCTS**

Grade A fluid—pasteurized  
 Grade A fluid—raw  
 Manufacturing—raw  
 Retail inspected—raw  
 Testing milk or milk products  
 Uninspected milk

**OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY**

Commercial  
 Industrial  
 Accident  
 Biological hazards  
 Energy stresses  
 Toxic chemicals

**RADIATION**

Education and training  
 Hospitals  
 Industry  
 Inventory of sources  
 Medical and dental operations  
 Schools  
 Surveillance  
 University

**RECREATION SANITATION**

Athletic areas  
 Camp grounds  
 Municipal parks  
 National parks  
 State parks

Marinas  
 Reservoirs

**SANITATION**

Disaster  
 Emergency  
 Fringe area  
 Highway  
 Radioactive fallout  
 Research  
 Rural  
 Virology  
 Weeds

**SANITATION EDUCATION**

Development and use of audio-visual aids  
 Community health committees

Industrial relations  
 Professional development  
 In-service training  
 Public relations  
 Use of mass communications media

**SEWAGE DISPOSAL**

Community sewer systems  
 Disposal of wastes from septic tanks and cesspools after cleaning  
 Inspection and/or abatement of outdoor privies  
 Oxidation ponds  
 Private disposal systems  
 Urban and rural

**SWIMMING POOLS AND BEACHES**

Private beaches  
 Private swimming pools  
 Public beaches  
 Public swimming pools  
 Wading pools

**WATER PROGRAMS**

Drinking fountain standards  
 Emergency water treatment  
 Private water supplies  
 Public water supplies  
 Sampling or testing of water  
 Water for industrial use  
 Water fluoridation

**WATER POLLUTION PROBLEMS**

Domestic wastes  
 Industrial wastes  
 Natural contaminants

**MISCELLANEOUS**

Accidents  
 Bacteriological standards  
 Carbon monoxide  
 Garages  
 Police cars  
 School bus  
 Public transportation  
 Disinfectant, insecticide, pesticide testing  
 Epidemiological survey  
 Hazardous substances  
 Laundromats and self-service dry cleaning establishments  
 Lead poisoning  
 Noise  
 Planning and zoning  
 Product safety  
 Radiological health  
 Schools  
 Ventilation, air conditioning, lighting, plumbing, etc.

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