Getting Started with

Records Management in Laserfiche

Contents

Introduction

Records consist of information created, received and maintained as evidence of business activities. While most records are documents, a record can be any piece of information which an organization finds valuable.

Records management involves the process of managing records through their life cycle. A records management strategy is vital to the life cycle of your organization's information. At an organizational level, a records management strategy governs how information is created, stored, shared, tracked and protected.

The U.S. has numerous federal records management laws and regulations that must be followed when managing government records. There are also many industry-specific regulations such as the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) regulations or the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Many corporations also have their own records management requirements which must be followed, even if an organization is not subject to federal or industry records regulations. A good records management strategy allows your organization to stay compliant with all of these records management requirements and regulations.

Laserfiche Records Management Edition

In order to perform records management functions in Laserfiche, you must first obtain the Records Management Edition (RME) add-on. Contact your systems administrator or department head to make sure that your Laserfiche system is licensed appropriately.

Laserfiche RME functions as an integral part of a well-designed records management program. It has easily configurable components that fit all of your organization's business needs. Laserfiche RME supports compliance with internal records management strategies and regulations. The system is also certified with the Department of Defense (DoD) 5015.2 standard, a widely accepted government specification.

Identifying a Record

The first step in developing a records management strategy is identifying your organization's records. If you answer yes to any of these questions, you should have a record:

- **Was it created in the course of business?**

  Examples include correspondence, agreements or studies.

- **Was it received for action?**

  Examples include public record requests or controlled correspondence.

- **Does it document organizational activities and actions?**

  Examples include calendars, meeting minutes or project reports.

- **Is it mandated by statute or regulation?**

  Examples include administrative records, legal/financial records or dockets.

- **Does it support financial obligations or legal claims?**

  Examples include contracts, grants or litigation case files.

- **Does it communicate organizational requirements?**

  Examples include guidance documents, policies or procedures.

If you answer yes to any of these questions, you may have a non-record:

- **Is it reference material?**
  Examples include vendor catalogs, phone books or technical journals.

- **Is it a convenience copy?**
  Examples include duplicate copies of correspondence, memos or directives.

- **Is it a stock copy?**
  Examples include organizational publications or forms.

- **Is it a draft or working paper?**
  Examples include draft with no substantive comments, rough notes or calculations.

Note: some drafts are needed to support a decision trail or are required by a records schedule.

If you answer yes to this question, you may have a personal paper:

- **Is it only related to your own affairs?**
  Examples include soccer schedule or PTA roster.

Record Life Cycle

Many records go through a life cycle that consists of several main stages and steps:

- **Creation and active:** During this stage, records are frequently accessed and may be modified.

- **Cutoff:** This step signals the end of the record's active stage and the beginning of a record's retention. When cutoff, a record becomes read-only.

- **Retention:** During this stage, the record is read-only and awaits its final disposition. The period of time that the record remains in retention is defined in the retention schedule.

- **Final disposition:** The records are removed from the system by either being handed over to another agency or by being destroyed. Some records may never reach disposition and may be retained permanently.

Active ▸ Cutoff ▸ Retention ▸ Disposition

Creating a Records Retention Schedule

An essential component of a records management strategy is a records retention schedule. A records retention schedule defines how long to keep different types of records and what happens to them once that time is reached. Laserfiche enables you to set up retention schedules that make the most sense for your records.

Before stating on a retention schedule, ask yourself these questions:

- Why are you implementing a records management solution? Is it to comply with federal regulations, or is it an independent effort to have greater control over the information within your organization?

- Who will act as your records manager? Who will work with your records manager to capture and file documents, and possibly to help with other administrative tasks?

Once you've answered the above questions, follow these steps to create a records retention schedule for your organization.

Step 1. Perform an inventory of your records.

There are many ways to conduct this inventory such as through the use of surveys and/or by meeting with record owners in person. The inventory will result in a list of all the records, documents and files in your organization, an assessment of their value and where they are stored. A records inventory worksheet can be a helpful tool during this process. A sample records inventory worksheet is included at the end of this guide. Feel free to use it as is or modify it to suit the needs of your organization. You can also make this worksheet electronic by using Laserfiche Forms.

This worksheet asks each business unit or department to provide the following information about their records:

- Record series name and description.

- Business value of the records within the record series.

- Business need to keep for a particular period to fulfill the business activity.

- Suggested historical value of the records.

- Legal requirements to keep these records.

- Media and format in which these records are stored.

- Usage statistics of the records.

- Estimated growth of document volume over time.

Step 2. Organize your records by category.

Since departments and business units can change over time, it is best to organize your records by category or function. The highest level of the filing hierarchy should consist of broad, organization-wide functions, with each function broken down into sub-groups. This functional category will be known as the record series.

For example, the first level of the filing hierarchy would be Employee Files with the sub-groups being Benefits Enrollment Forms, Onboarding Documents, Tax Documents, etc.

Recommended	Not Recommended
Employee Files • Benefits Enrollment Forms • Onboarding Documents • Job Applications • Tax Forms **Financial Records** • Invoices • Purchase Orders • Vendor Contracts	• Benefits Enrollment Forms • Onboarding Documents • Job Applications • Tax Forms • Invoices • Purchase Orders • Vendor Contracts

Step 3. Research industry regulations.

Certain industries are highly regulated when it comes to record retention. Perform research to see which regulations your organization has to follow. The best place to obtain this information is by speaking with your organization's legal team, or by contacting your local or state government office, or industry association.

Step 4. Compare your records against your research.

Review the organization's records against the retention periods specified by the regulation(s) that you identified during your research, as well as the business requirements and historical value identified during your records inventory. This is where organizing your records by type and functional groups comes in handy. If you find yourself having to comply with multiple retention regulations for any given record series, use the longest time period specified to make sure that all retention regulations and needs are met.

Step 5. Draft retention and disposition procedures.

This will help you create a user friendly records retention schedule. The Association for Information and Image Management (AIIM) recommends the use of codes such as: CY for current year, P for permanent, H for historical, FY for fiscal year and numeric value for a specific number of years in order to simplify your retention schedule. The retention schedule should include:

- A name and description of each record series.

- The retention period for all records sub-groups within the record series.

- The storage location and medium for the records within each record series.

- The event or date that will move the records from active status into the retention period.

- The disposition procedures for the records.

You'll find a sample retention schedule worksheet at the end of this book that you can use for creating a retention schedule for your Laserfiche records.

Step 6. Work with your legal department to review and approve the proposed retention schedule.

Some things to take into account during this review include legislative requirements, statues of limitations, and the administrative and historical value of all records.

Step 7. Communicate and publish the records retention schedule.

Make sure that the schedule is easily accessible to everyone in the organization. Keep it in a prominent, centralized location so that everyone can see it easily. Develop and conduct training for staff to make sure they understand the purpose of the records program and their responsibilities. Remember that everyone has to know how to protect their organization's records and that this is not only the records manager's job. Include the training as part of new employee onboarding and add regularly recurring refresher training for all employees.

Creating a retention schedule is just one part of the process; it will need to be reviewed and revised periodically to keep it current and updated according per any new laws or regulations. AIIM proposes to review the retention schedule annually and the policy and policy supporting documentation, such as the training plan, at least every two years. They also propose performing periodic spot checks and audits to ensure compliance.

General Considerations Before Setting up Your Laserfiche Records Management System

Laserfiche RME provides organizations with different ways to manage retention rules and achieve records management compliance. Records management can be rigid, or more flexible and automated.
The degree of automation depends on the organization. If you answer yes to any of the below questions, then you may want to look at a less automated and more rigid records management structure.

- Do you have to have your records stored or segregated in a particular way?

- Does your organization have a dedicated records manager?

- Does a records manager need to approve each record before it is placed in the read-only retention state?

Records Management Folder Structure

Laserfiche RME allows you to house records in a specific structure based on document life cycle, making it easier for records managers to identify which records are eligible for cutoff or disposition. The structure hierarchy is as follows:

- Record series.

- Record folders.

- Folders and/or records.

Record series and record folders each contain rules that specify how the records contained within will be managed throughout their life cycle. Rules configured on higher levels of the hierarchical structure will act as default rules for child record series and record folders. Records are always governed by the rules of their parent record folder, unless explicitly changed.

1. **Parent Record Series:** The record series is used to define record management instructions and classification. Rules set at the parent level become the default settings for its subsets.

2. **Child Record Series:** The child record series inherits default values from its parent; however, new and stricter rules can be set at this level. Rules set here pertain to its children only.

3. **Record Folders:** Record folders are distinguished from record series in that the contents of a record folder are at the same stage of the records life cycle. Furthermore, records management actions are always performed at the record folder level or lower, and never on the record series.

4. **Folders:** Although they do not provide records management functionality, folders can be added for organizational purposes. The records within the folder will still inherit the properties from the record folder or record series.

5. **Records:** Records inherit cutoff instructions and retention from record folders or record series. Retention can also be applied to individual records.

Note that records don't need to be stored in dedicated record series and record folders in order to have retention rules and holds applied.

Records can have retention schedules assigned even when not stored in records series.

Cutoff Instructions

A cutoff instruction determines when a record is eligible to enter the read-only retention stage. There are seven different cutoff instructions in Laserfiche, but we will focus on the three most popular:

- **Time-based cutoff:** When a retention schedule is triggered based on a time-based cycle period (such as monthly or weekly).

- **Event-based cutoff:** When an event on the record (such as employee termination) triggers a retention schedule.

- **Time + event-based cutoff:** Triggered when an event occurs, but the records are only eligible for cutoff after a subsequent time-based cycle period. Basically, this cutoff collects all of the records for which retention was triggered by an event and gives them all the same starting date for future eligibility calculations.

It is a best practice to use either a time-based or time + event-based cutoff. When it comes time for final disposition, all the records with the same cutoff eligibility date will be eligible for disposition on the same date, enabling you to process hundreds of records in one batch instead of one record at a time. Most regulations specify a minimum retention period, so keeping a record a few weeks longer in order to process it with other records should not be a problem.

More information about record folder cutoff can be found in the Laserfiche Records Management Administration help files.

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Best Practice: Reuse Instruction Definitions

Many records management instruction definitions are similar. For example, there is usually a standardized archive location, general standard retention times for basic handling and so on. Creating generic cutoff, retention and disposition instructions allows you to reuse them across record types and keep the number of unique instructions to pick from to a minimum, making records management much more efficient.

For example, let's use the following physical retention schedule for a university and convert it to RME.

Code	Records	Retention
24-10a	Admission. Applicants who are offered a place, but do not attend.	Retain current academic year + 1 year, then destroy.
24-10b	Admission. Applicants who are offered a place, accept and enroll.	Retain for 6 years after graduation or withdrawal. Then accession to "Academic Registry".
28-32b	Unit Evaluation Reports.	Retain 3 years after current academic year is complete, then destroy.
10-16c	Academic Appeals.	Retain 6 years after last action, then accession to "Academic Registry".
10-17a	Complaints.	After last action, retain 3 years then destroy.

The easiest way to do this is to reuse some of the elements. The color-coded items are the ones that we can group together.

From this we can create two different cutoff instructions:

- **Time-based:** Academic Year.

- **Time + Event-based:** An event + Academic Year.

We can also create three retention schedules:

- 1 year, then destroy.

- 6 years, then accession to Academic Registry.

- 3 years, then destroy.

Retention
Retain **current academic year** + **1 year**, then **destroy.**
Retain for 6 years after **graduation or withdrawal.** Then **accession to "Academic Registry".**
Retain 3 years after **current academic year** is complete, then **destroy.**
Retain 6 years after **last action**, then **accession to "Academic Registry".**
After **last action**, retain **3 years** then **destroy.**
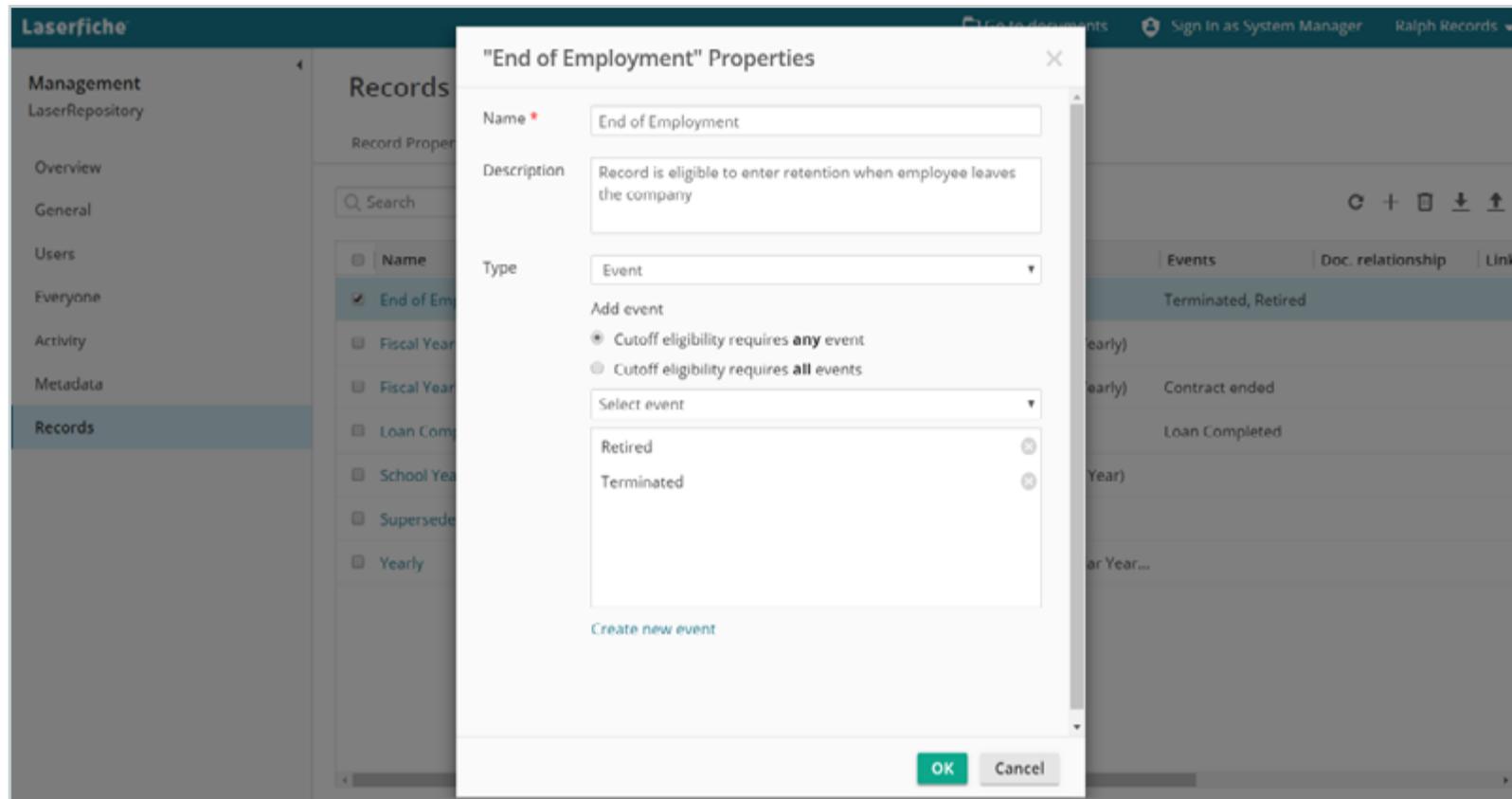
Configuring a cutoff instruction in the web client

More records management best practices can be found in this Solution Exchange article.

Applying Retention Schedules

Retention schedules are created and defined in the Laserfiche Administration Console or on the Management page in the Laserfiche web client. They can be applied to record series, record folders or individual records in the Laserfiche web or Windows client. You must be assigned the Records Management privilege to create, modify and apply retention schedules.
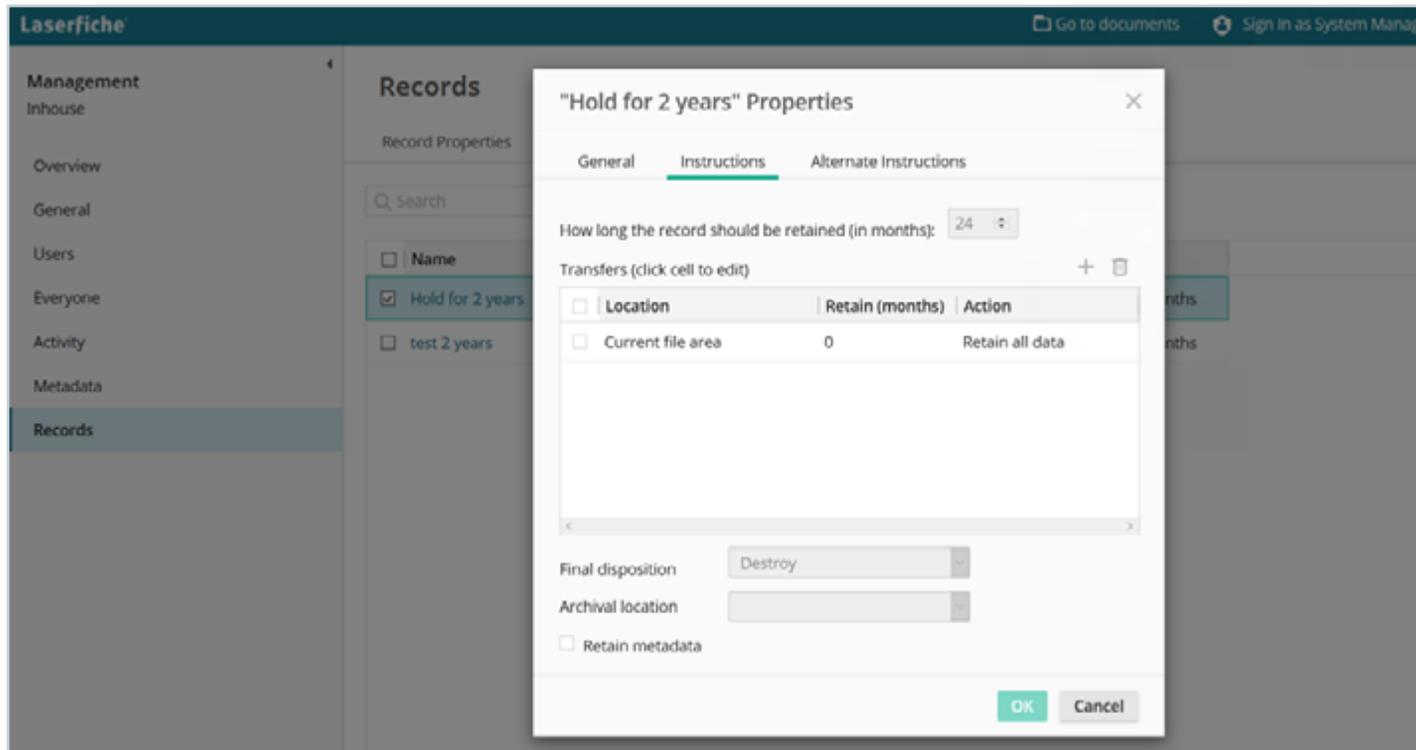
Configuring retention schedules in the web client

An example of a retention schedule in the web client

The Settings tab of the Records page in the Laserfiche web client Management section provides general options to support adherence to your records management policy. For example, in Laserfiche, records management properties can be applied to documents regardless of whether they are stored in record series.

If you would like to restrict the application of retention schedules and cutoff instructions to records and folders under record series, then make sure the "Only allow records management classifications for documents and folders under record series" box is checked.
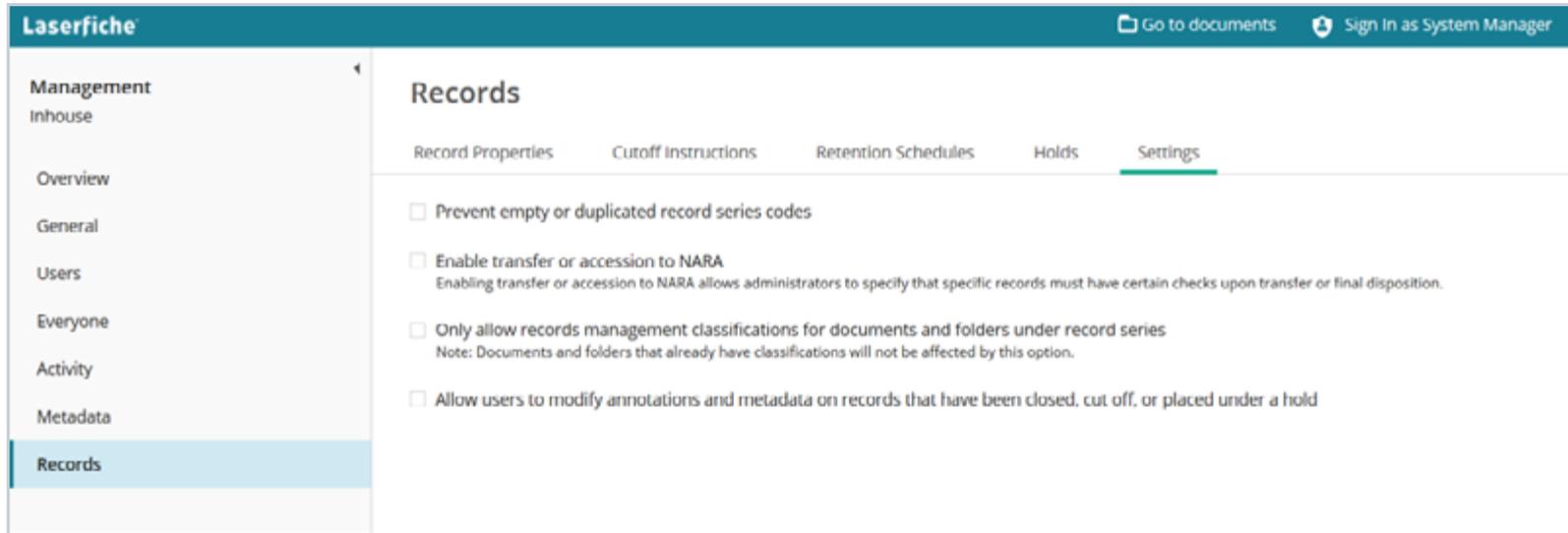
The Settings tab of the Records page in the Laserfiche web client

If that option is unchecked then any document in the repository, regardless of whether it is in a record series, will be able to have records management classifications applied to it.

You can also access these settings in the Records Management tab of the Repository Options Settings in the Laserfiche Administration Console.

For more information about implementing records retention schedules in Laserfiche, see the Laserfiche Records Management Administration help files. For more information about the various records management settings, see this page in the help files.

To help you upload your retention schedule from into Laserfiche, we've create a Record Series Setup Utility. With this utility, you can take a spreadsheet and upload it into Laserfiche without having to set up each cutoff instruction and retention separately.

Vital Records

Records that are considered imperative to the organization's operation are called vital records. These records are subject to periodic review and update. Laserfiche RME allows the records manager to designate a record as vital and provides means of officially indicating that the record has been reviewed as mandated. Vital record status is set at the record folder level and applies to all records inside the folder.

One example of a vital record is an organization's disaster preparedness plan. The plan is considered essential to the safety of its employees and should therefore be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

Laserfiche RME provides a way of assigning review schedules, and indicates and chronicles when records have been reviewed, as mandated by your organization.

More information about working with vital records can be found in the Laserfiche Records Management help files.

Holds

Placing a hold on a record prevents modification to it and halts its records management life cycle. Most often, a hold is applied for legal or regulatory reasons. You can also apply a hold if you know that the records will be part of an upcoming audit. When placing a record under a hold, you must specify a reason.

Holds can be applied to folders, in which case all the documents and folders within that folder will be under a hold, or to individual documents. A single hold can be applied to multiple documents, and a document can have multiple holds applied. You can also apply a due date to a hold, and administrators can view a list of all holds in the repository and which entries they apply to.

Once the need for the hold has passed, the hold can be removed and the record will resume its original life cycle. If a record has multiple holds on it, it will only resume its life cycle when all holds have been removed.

Placing a hold on an active record folder or series prevents the removal of records. However, additional records can still be filed into the record folder while it is under a hold. Any records added to a record folder under a hold will themselves be placed under the same hold.

More information about placing holds can be found in the Laserfiche Records Management Administration help files.

Performing Dispositions and Actions on Records

Final disposition is the last action performed in a retention schedule. Typically, upon final disposition, your organization no longer retains the records in question, and they are either destroyed or sent to an external authority for archival. Laserfiche RME has three types of final disposition actions:

Accession: The records are valuable enough that they cannot be permanently destroyed at your organization without being archived at another organization. The records in question are removed from your records management system and transferred to another organization for management.

When accession is performed on a record, the records manager is allowed to export the records, folders and metadata in a Laserfiche briefcase.
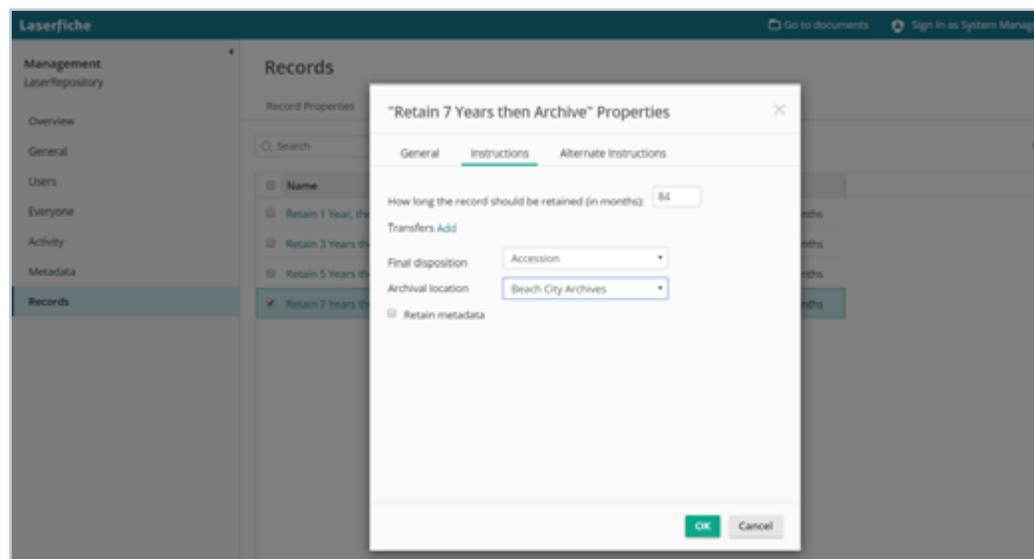
Applying accession properties to a record

Destruction: The records are no longer useful to anyone and do not need to be preserved elsewhere, or it is legally mandated that the records not be retained. They can be permanently destroyed.
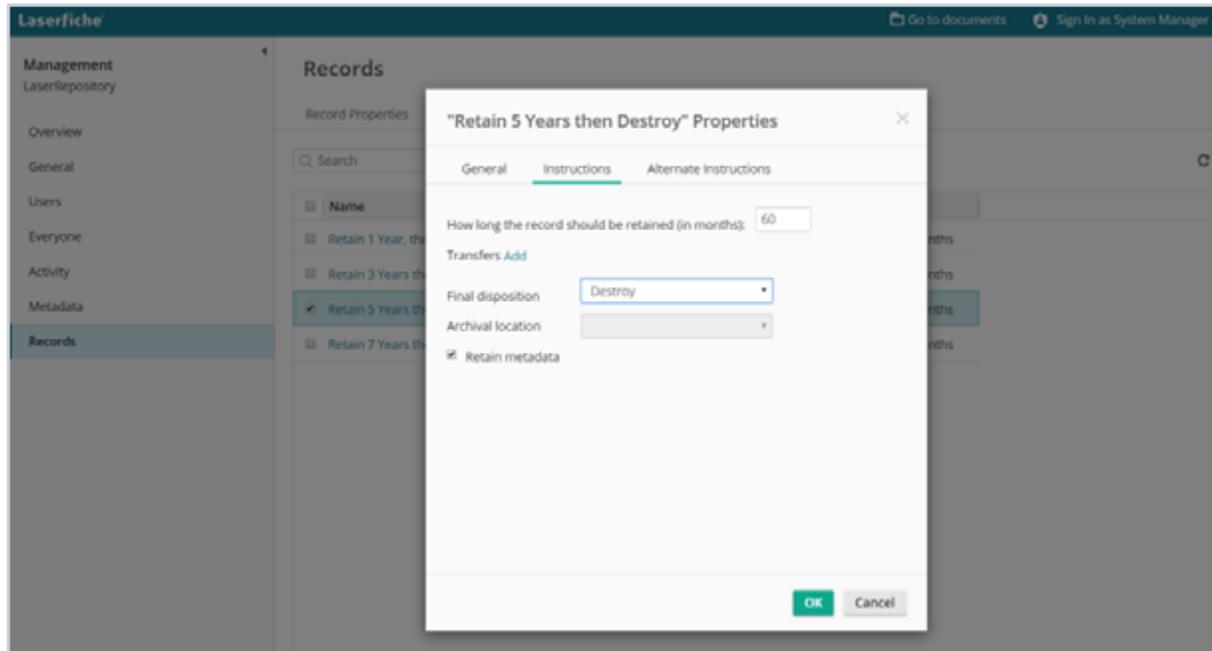
Applying destruction properties to a record

None: No disposition action is taken. The records remain in the current system, are not removed or deleted, and authority over them is retained. A final disposition of none is not the same as marking a record permanent, because a permanent record may still be accessioned.

More information about disposition actions can be found in the Laserfiche Records Management Administration help files: accession and destruction.

Searching for Records Management Objects

Laserfiche Advanced Search allows you to search for content based on different records management functions including:

- Cutoff eligibility, cutoff instructions and critical event dates.

- Disposition type, eligibility date, retention schedules and current location of records.

- Whether a record has a hold applied to it.

- Record series, record folder or individual record names.

- Record series code, description and disposition authority.

- Whether records are permanent or non-permanent.

- Whether a record is a vital or non-vital record.

Getting Started with Records Management in Laserfiche **29**
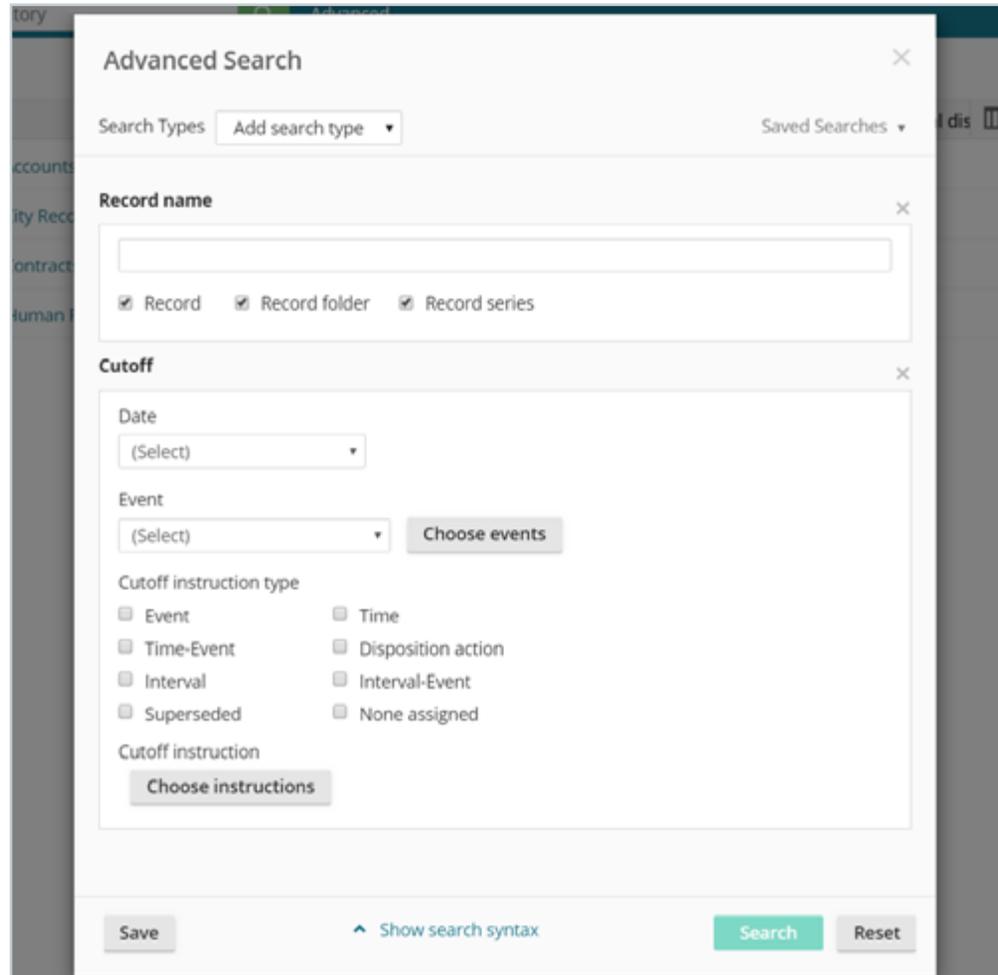
Setting up a records management search

Click Advanced in the web client toolbar to access advanced search.

The quick access view in the Laserfiche web and Windows clients allows you to quickly and conveniently perform common searches on records, such as:

- Records eligible for cutoff.

- Records eligible for disposition.

- Vital records to review.

By default, the quick access view shows records folders in its search results, but not individual records. To include them in these results, be sure to check the "Include Records" checkbox.
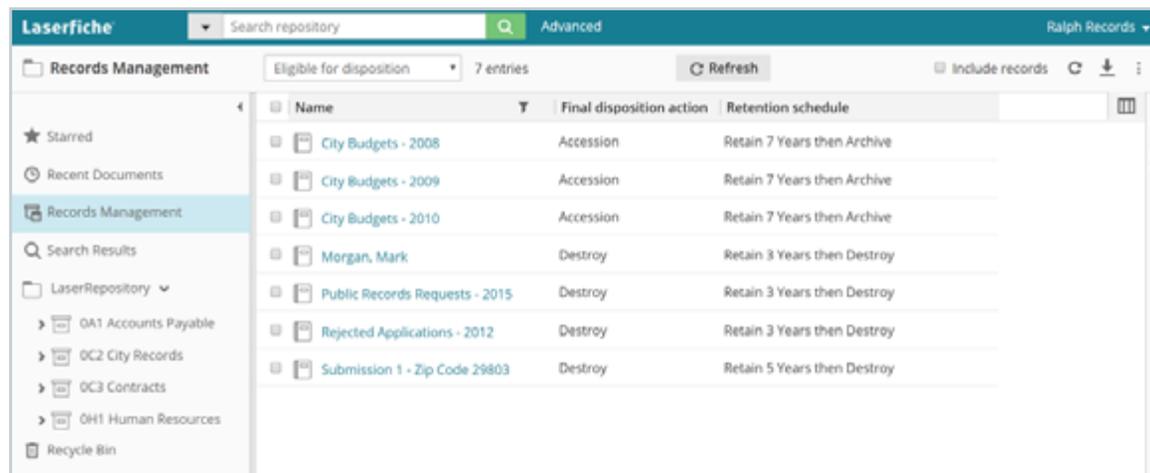
Records management search results

Migrating Records into Laserfiche

Once you have the records management structure set up, it is time to migrate your paper records over into Laserfiche. Here are some tips for migrating records into Laserfiche:

- Start with scanning in the records with the longest retention time left first. If records are up for disposition soon, then there is no need to spend the time and effort to scan them in just to delete them shortly after.

- Set up your folder structure and naming convention before scanning in records. Make sure to also create templates and fields ahead of time.

- Use Laserfiche Workflow or Quick Fields to file your documents in the appropriate folders and name them according to a standardized naming convention, as well as to apply appropriate metadata. Workflow can also apply appropriate access rights, retention schedules and holds.

Records Management Terminology

Accession: Accession is similar to transfer; however, unlike transfer, during which records may be transferred within the organization, accession entails transferring responsibility and authority of the records to another organization, generally for archival purposes.

Active records: Any record that is regularly accessed or used within the system is considered an active record. Active records are configured with specific criteria which defines the length of their active life cycle.

Briefcase: A collection of documents and folders can be exported as a Laserfiche briefcase: a single file that compresses the data contained in it. When records are exported for transfer or accession, records management data is included in the export; this includes records management objects, properties and states.

Close: When a record folder is closed, records inside the folder cannot be modified and no new records can be filed in it. This marks the beginning of the inactive phase of the record's life cycle.

Cutoff: When a record is cutoff, it is automatically closed and it is no longer considered active. This begins the retention and disposition phase of its life cycle.

Destruction: This action is the equivalent of permanently deleting the record.

Disposition: When the retention period ends, inactive documents are subject to disposition actions. There are three types of final disposition: accession, destruction and none.

Document relationships: The records manager can define relationships between documents. These relationships can be applied, by users, to mark documents that are associated with one another. Each link identifies the source and the linked-to document.

Eligibility: Records become eligible to enter the next stage of their life cycle based on instructions defined by either their or their record folder's properties. These instructions dictate what constitutes as the record's cutoff criteria and what retention schedule the record will follow. The cutoff eligibility date determines further retention dates.

Entry access rights: Entry access rights are the primary mechanism for securing documents in a Laserfiche repository. Entry access rights are used to ensure that only the appropriate users are able to perform records management actions.

Entry ID: Every object (record series, record folder, folder, or record) must have a unique identifier; in Laserfiche, the identifier is called the Entry ID.

Filing date: A record folder's filing date determines the cutoff eligibility date for record folders with either time- or interval-based cutoff criteria, as it is the start point at which the time period begins to count down. By default, the filing date equals the date the record folder was created in Laserfiche, however, if retention began prior to the record folder's existence in the Laserfiche repository, you can modify the filing date, in the record properties, to represent the true date at which retention began.

Hold: Placing a hold on a record prevents modification to it and halts its records management life cycle.

Inactive records: After a record fulfills its usefulness and is no longer frequently accessed by the organization, it may be retained for a specific period of time as an inactive record.

Record: Records consist of information created, received and maintained as evidence of business activities.

Record series: A record series is the highest level of organization in Laserfiche Records Management.

Retention: The retention phase marks a holding period where the record is no longer actively being modified, but should still be accessible within the RMA and is still under the jurisdiction of the original organization.

Retention schedule: A retention schedule is a collection of rules, usually dictated by compliance regulations, that governs how records are to be stored and for how long.

Transfer: During the retention period, records can be transferred to a new location within the original organization.

Vital record: Records that are considered imperative to the organization's operation.

Additional Laserfiche Resources

Laserfiche Help Files:

Laserfiche Records Management.

Records Management Administration.

Record Series Setup Utility.

White Papers:

Introduction to Laserfiche Records Management Edition.

Records Management Edition and Laserfiche Security.

Online Training:

Laserfiche Records Management Certification.

Records Management with Laserfiche 10 Course.

Laserfiche Flexible Records Management Course.

Articles:

Best Practices in Records Management.

What's the Difference Between Document and Records Management?

How to Make Sure Your Employees Maintain an Organized Repository.

Migrate Documents to Laserfiche in a Batch.

Customer Examples:

How TN Americas Completely Revamped Records Management.

Implement Records Management in Five Steps.

Kentucky Sanitation District #1's Transparent Records Management Implementation.

How the City of Mount Pearl Manages Records.

Records Inventory Worksheet

Department or division responsible for this record series:

Point of contact for this record series:

Record series title and number:

Earliest record date: Latest record date:

Are records still being created?

    Yes

    No

If Yes, how frequently are these records created?

Media and format that these records are stored in:

Paper

CD/DVD

Microfiche

Tapes

Digital – non Laserfiche

Digital – Laserfiche

Other – specify

Location of these records (building or room for physical files, computer drive for digital files):

Are there other copies of these records? If yes, then where are they stored?

Usage Statistics

User	Usage frequency (daily, weekly, monthly, annually, etc.)

Fill out the table based on how long you need to keep these records per the specified criteria.

Criterion	Length of Time to Keep Record
Business activity	
Historical value	
Legal requirements	

Suggested retention period based on information specified above:

Additional comments:

Inventory performed by: Date:

Sample Retention Schedule Worksheet

- Records Category refers to the major group of records, such as Corporate Records or Student Records.

- Record Series Name is the record type within the category, such as Audits or General Ledger.

- Record Series Code is the code associated with the record series.

- Cutoff Instruction refers to the event or date that will start the retention period, such as after graduation or monthly.

- Retention Period refers to how long the records within the record series will be kept after it is cutoff, such as permanent or 5 years.

- Disposition Method refers to what happens to the record after the retention period ends, such as destruction or accession to a different agency for archival

Records Category:

Record Series Name	Record Series Code	Cutoff Instruction	Retention Period	Disposition Method

Records Category:

Record Series Name	Record Series Code	Cutoff Instruction	Retention Period	Disposition Method

Records Category:

Record Series Name	Record Series Code	Cutoff Instruction	Retention Period	Disposition Method

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