

# Hard dollar savings from filing equipment and supplies

Correct choice of filing cabinets can save space and help people find documents quickly. It adds up to a better bottom line



By David Rintoul

Space and time are two assets that can be saved with proper management and storage of documents. The previous article in this new series (Efficiency File: Records Management 101, page 18, February, *Canadian Facility Management & Design*) discussed the space savings that can be achieved through effective records management. These space savings come from at least two things:

- Choosing the best equipment and supplies; and
- Using retention schedules.

This article examines savings you can realize through the first of these two: effective use of filing equipment and supplies.

A mistake often made is to choose filing equipment solely on appearance, rather than functionality. The traditional filing cabinets that most offices use are inefficient in terms of space, file access and retrieval.

The biggest cause of wasted space in filing cabinets is the use of drawers rather than shelves. Filing cabinet drawers have two main problems. First, the drawer must be pulled out, which effectively doubles the cabinet's footprint in terms of the total space that must be allocated to it. Second, since you have to look down into a drawer, you can only use a drawer if it is lower than your shoulders, otherwise you can't see the files. This means a file

cabinet with drawers can only have four or maybe five drawers, depending on your height.

Storing files on shelves frees you from these restrictions. A file cabinet with shelves can be six or even seven shelves high and still be comfortable to use. Cabinets with shelves are also slightly longer. As a result, the capacity of a seven-shelf file cabinet has almost double the storage capacity of a four-drawer cabinet.

## Even more cost effective

Depending on your requirements, there are other even more cost-effective equipment options. For example, instead of shelves, files can be stored on open shelves or in "box on rail" systems. These open systems can be placed in locked rooms where security is needed. Another option is mobile shelving, which provides more compact storage by creating a "movable aisle".

The type of file folder you choose also has a huge impact on your space requirements. For example, folders with the tab on the top require hanging pockets to hold them in place in a file drawer. Hanging pockets by themselves take up about one third of the drawer space, even when empty. So, you end up requiring 33 per cent more cabinets and taking up 33 per cent more space than you need.

If you use file folders with tabs on the end and store them on a shelf, you don't need hanging pockets. Instead, several thin metal file supports, similar to bookends, hold the files in place on each shelf. The result is that the full capacity of each shelf is used more efficiently. You buy less equipment and you use less space.

To compare, imagine a volume of

files, let's say, 15,000. In top-tab folders in four-drawer file cabinets, they would take up about 110 cabinets. At \$15 per square foot per year, all things considered, the cost to store those cabinets would be about \$11,550 per annum.

In comparison, with seven-shelf cabinets and end-tab folders, the same number of files would take up just 42 cabinets. At the same rate per square foot per year, the cost to store the same volume of files would only be \$2,205 per annum. Besides cost savings, the



*Lateral filing with end-tab folders does not require drawers to be pulled out and puts files to be within reach when stored six or seven shelves high.*

files are easier to use, and therefore users will save time looking for the files they need. The payback period for the investment in new cabinets is often less than one year.

The bottom line is that by choosing the right filing equipment and supplies, you will maximize your space utilization. The result will be substantial direct, hard dollar savings for your organization.

**Next issue: the benefits of a formalized retention schedule.**

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