

For a smooth and successful transition, it's essential that you create an electronic recordkeeping system that is accessible, secure and functional. Here are the do's and don'ts to consider when going paperless in the workplace.

DO keep files confidential at all times. For those authorized to access the documents, make sure you have strong security settings, password protection and data encryption in place.

DO make sure that electronic employee records can be readily converted into legible and readable paper copies, if necessary.

DO have a formal written policy in your employee handbook. It should state how your business protects employee information, and that sensitive data is handled only by approved individuals.

DO have safeguards in place to prevent accidental or unauthorized alterations.

DO allow employees to view their personnel files upon request. Employees have the right to see their files during business hours with a company executive present.

DO know the laws. Federal and state agencies are increasingly permitting electronic personnel records. For example, the DHS lets employers fill out and store I-9 forms electronically, the EEOC has approved electronic records for Title VII, ADA, and ADEA documents and ERISA regulations allow for electronic recordkeeping. Also, the federal E-SIGN law generally makes electronic signatures and contracts just as legal and enforceable as paper contracts that are manually signed with ink.

DO check your system regularly and keep it current. It's important to stay on top of software updates, security upgrades, password changes and other technical aspects of your electronic system.

DON'T keep documents beyond the legal deadline. Know the recordkeeping guidelines, and properly discard documents after the deadline has passed. Keeping documents, the Form I-9, for example, past the required timeframe can actually count against your business in the event of a lawsuit or government audit.

DON'T be inconsistent with record storing. Take the time to establish the system that works best for your business and stick to it. That way you'll be able to quickly and easily access the documents you need every time.

DON'T wait to upload new employee files. Update and process files regularly, or you'll fall behind.

DON'T throw out paper copies of any documents that can't be clearly, accurately or completely transferred to your electronic recordkeeping system. In these cases, you should keep the paper backup.

DON'T wing it. If you're ever unsure if you're complying with federal and state laws, consult your attorney for guidance.