

## **Vital Records**

Vital records are any records that are necessary for the survival of the business. These include software (computer programs and their license agreements), backup tapes, data files, one-of-a-kind paper documents (e.g., contracts, tax documentation), procedure manuals, procedures for conducting functions manually (i.e., without computers), microfilm and microfiche, and controlled substance records.

Considerable effort and technology have been developed to store records safely and to make sure they can be retrieved quickly, without errors, for almost immediate return to normal operations. The cost of data storage and retrieval generally is directly proportionate to the time it takes to restore the record system. However, the more a business invests in data storage and retrieval, the quicker it can expect to become functional again.

Perhaps the simplest form of data storage is to keep copies (or originals) off site, such as at home. This works well for many items, but in areas prone to large-scale disasters, such as earthquakes and hurricanes, the owner's home may also be affected. This makes home storage less useful. A better and cost-effective solution is to store data in a fireproof safe.

Data restoration is possible only if there is also hardware to run the program with which the data was stored. Therefore for data storage and retrieval, compatible hardware is needed that can run the programs that are essential to run the business. One solution has been for the practitioner to purchase backup computers (i.e., laptops) that have the essential capabilities to run the business.

Data must be protected in disasters so that rapid access can be established after the event. A number of companies can back up data at a distant site and restore businesses within hours of a disaster. Other systems involve underground storage and electronic vaulting. In electronic vaulting the original data are kept on the premises but electronic versions are stored off site, often in a different state with a relatively low risk of disaster.