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—Rand Key

ern Nevada (CSN) in Las Vegas. The virus could have granted a hacker access to more than 198,000 student names, Social Security numbers, and dates of birth. Upon discovering the breach, administrators immediately shut down the network and attempted to pin down the source of the leak.

“All students were immediately notified of the possible data theft following the investigations,” recalls Rand Key, CSN’s executive vice president of planning and development. “A hotline was installed for students to call with questions, and a Web page was posted with information con-

## 10 Ways to Keep Digital Data Safe

1. Adopt a comprehensive privacy policy that includes responsible information-handling practices.
2. Store sensitive data in secure, encrypted computer networks.
3. Dispose of documents properly. Shred.
4. Conduct regular staff training.
5. Put limits on data display and disclosure of Social Security numbers.
6. Restrict data access to staff with legitimate needs to know.
7. Safeguard mobile devices that contain sensitive personal data.
8. Notify students and employees of computer security breaches involving sensitive personal information.
9. Develop a crisis-management plan.
10. Regularly audit compliance with privacy policies.

# DOCUMENT PROTECTION:

## Storing important physical records

By Van Carlisle

Institutions of higher learning in the United States are obligated to protect themselves, as well as the students they serve, from unexpected events and natural disasters. From earthquakes to hurricanes to wildfires, the modern definition of protection goes beyond basic necessities such as food, water, and shelter. Colleges also must preserve the vital records and information that keep institutions running.

Continuity and disaster recovery plans are a paramount concern for colleges of all sizes. When trouble strikes, often the first priority (after accounting for the health of students and faculty) is to secure the records vital to the college’s operations.

The hope always is that disaster can be avoided, but—in the event that catastrophe finds its way to your campus—here are some thoughts on how to create a vital records recovery plan.

### What to Do

#### Step 1: Determine Possible Threats to Your Vital Records

First, it is important to take into account all types of disasters that might befall your campus, including any internal hazards that could result in fire or flood inside record-storage areas and certain forces of nature, such as electric storms, tornadoes, and flash floods that could destroy any digital or paper records. It is also important to reduce the risk of simple human mistakes—spilled water, for example—that might result in the loss or destruction of a vital record.

#### Step 2: Classify Your College’s Vital Records

Every college has different criteria as to what constitutes a vital record. The amount of protection you seek should depend on the type and level of value placed on these items. Typically, records are classified in four categories:

1. **VITAL:** documents that are considered irreplaceable
2. **IMPORTANT:** not irreplaceable, but could be reproduced only at considerable expense, time, and labor
3. **USEFUL:** records that, if lost, will cause some inconvenience, but could be readily replaced
4. **NONESSENTIAL:** records that are in line for routine destruction

The most important category is the vital record. On a community college campus, this might include:

- Contracts/agreements that prove ownership of property, equipment, vehicles, products, etc.
- Operational records, such as current or unaudited accounting and tax records, current personnel and payroll records, client account histories, and shipping delivery records
- Current student files
- Current standard operating procedures
- Produced reports and summaries

#### Step 3: Decide What Type of Storage Is Best for Your Vital Records

Records can be destroyed in a number of ways. The most common reason for a document to be unusable after a fire or flood, for example, is water damage. Fire-suppression systems and water from fire hoses often inflict the most damage to documents. That’s why many colleges now are keeping vital records in fireproof storage containers. A UL-rated and impact-tested fireproof safe or filing cabinet properly protects paper documents in most disasters. Likewise, important digital documents, such as CDs or Zip drives, might be stored in a Media Vault. This specialized container is designed to protect sensitive digital media from disasters as well as more common problems, such as heat and humidity.

#### Step 4: Incorporate an Off-Site Solution With On-Site Preparation

Some schools keep archived student records and other vital information off-site. But this practice is not enough and can be very expensive. Information such as current student records and billing documents need to be protected and backed up daily on-site.

When considering what documents to keep on-site and what to move to an off-site location, inquire about any charges you will incur, either for moving the documents or for keeping them secure. Also, find out how your vitals will be transported to and from the off-site facility. Get the details regarding what type of protection is offered. Will your documents be kept in a secure vault? Is digital media stored separately and properly?

Regardless of what off-site facility you choose, consider the distance of the facility relative to campus. Any off-site storage facility needs to be far enough away that if, for example, a hurricane strikes your community or region, both locations would not be affected. The facility should offer 24-hour safe access and a strong security plan to protect information and storage contents.

VAN CARLISLE is the CEO of FireKing, a security company in New Albany, Ind.

cerning how to protect their identities and how to contact credit bureaus.”

Additional security measures also were put in place. Network administrators added new layers to the college’s firewall, installed a centralized server patch management system on the broader network to close any undetected holes, and implemented new intrusion detection and protection software to alert administrators to future breaches.

Not unlike JCC, CSN also sought

to increase faculty, staff, and student awareness of the issues involved in effective data security.

“There have been no additional incidents, but security is an ongoing process,” says Key. “No matter how much money is spent and no matter how sophisticated efforts are, there’s always some person or entity trying to breach those precautions.”

DARLENE BREMER is an education and technology writer living in Solomons, Md.

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