

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-668](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

NARA manages the Federal Records Centers Program, which is to ensure the storage and preservation of federal records, including paper, photographic, audio, video, and film. Records storage facilities are required to meet certain minimum structural, environmental, property, and life safety standards set forth in federal regulations.

GAO was requested to conduct a study of key aspects of the program. GAO's objectives were to (1) determine the types of facilities agencies use to store federal records and the extent to which NARA's data on agencies' use of storage facilities are complete, (2) evaluate the extent to which NARA has determined these facilities to be compliant with standards in 36 C.F.R. Part 1234, (3) determine what actions NARA has taken to minimize damage to records in federal records centers and the extent to which it documents such efforts, and (4) determine how NARA determines storage fees and whether fees differ among facilities. To do so, GAO obtained, analyzed, and corroborated documentation on records storage facilities, identified and compared records storage fees, and interviewed NARA officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that NARA (1) obtain complete data on where agencies are storing records, (2) develop a schedule to bring noncompliant storage areas into compliance with 36 C.F.R. Part 1234, and (3) establish a requirement to document the results of efforts to minimize damage to federal records. NARA concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-13-668](#). For more information, contact Valerie Melvin at (202) 512-6304 or melvinv@gao.gov.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

Actions Needed to Ensure Facilities That Store Federal Records Meet Standards

What GAO Found

Agencies are to store federal records in three types of facilities:

- **Federal records centers:** The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) operates 18 federal records centers that are comprised of 24 facilities (buildings) located across the United States. Each facility includes storage areas, referred to as bays.
- **Agency records centers:** Agencies also establish and operate records centers for storing their own records. As of May 2013, NARA had identified 18 agency records centers that were operated by 6 agencies or offices.
- **Commercial records storage facilities:** Agencies also use private sector commercial facilities. As of May 2013, agencies reported that 12 vendors provided 22 facilities, which were used by 11 agencies.

These facilities notwithstanding, NARA does not know where all agencies are storing records. NARA has solicited data from agencies about their use of agency records centers and commercial records storage facilities, but not all agencies have submitted data. Further, the data agencies submitted—mostly from 2008 and 2009—are now outdated. As a result, NARA cannot be assured that all agencies are using one of the three types of authorized facilities.

NARA determined that 20 of its 24 federal records center facilities were fully compliant with 36 C.F.R. Part 1234 because all of their bays satisfied the regulation; of the remaining 4, 2 facilities with inadequate shelving were partially compliant, 1 facility with insufficient protections against pipe leaks was not compliant, and the remaining facility was to be replaced. As of July 2013, NARA had plans to bring these 4 facilities into full compliance, but did not have a schedule for completing the plans at 2 of the facilities. As a result, NARA does not have a basis for determining progress toward correcting deficiencies in those facilities that do not yet fully meet the standards. Also, while NARA had approved 10 agency records centers and 22 commercial records storage facilities, it has inspected 1 of 18 agency records centers and 13 commercial records storage facilities. Until NARA completes planned inspections of all remaining facilities, it cannot be reasonably assured that agencies are storing records in facilities that meet standards.

To facilitate the protection of federal records from permanent damage, NARA had generally taken steps consistent with a checklist it requires federal records centers to follow when incidents (e.g., roof or sprinkler leaks) occur. However, it did not always document the results of its efforts to minimize damage because the checklist does not include a step for doing so. Specifically, of the 55 incidents that occurred from January 2009 through March 2013, NARA provided documentation about the final outcome for 46 incidents. For the remaining 9 incidents, it could not provide documentation that included the final results of its efforts. Without a process that includes documenting the results of its efforts, NARA is not positioned to fully report on the effectiveness of its actions to minimize damage to federal records and to provide a third party with information to validate the results of its efforts.

Storage fees are determined by NARA's Federal Records Centers Program and the Office of the Chief Financial Officer using the existing fee schedule, expense projections, and workload projections. The storage fees charged by NARA in fiscal year 2013 were comparable to fees charged by commercial vendors in that same time frame. For example, NARA's fee of \$0.23 per cubic foot was higher than fees charged by two vendors and lower than fees charged by two other vendors.