### Section A. Paper Claims Folders Storage and Control

#### Overview

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| In This Section | This section contains the following topics: |

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| Topic | Topic Name |
| 1 | General Information About Paper Claims Folders Storage and Control |
| 2 | Misfiled Paper Claims Folders |
| 3 | Paper Claims Folders Requiring Restricted Access and Employee Certification of Veteran Status |
| 4 | Storing Paper Claims Folders at a Restricted Access Claims Center (RACC) |
| 5 | Safeguarding Paper Claims Folders Containing Restricted Information |
| 6 | Paper Claims Folders Pertaining to Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) or Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), Alcohol Abuse, Drug Abuse, or Sickle Cell Anemia |
| 7 | Control of Paper Claims Folders |
| 8 | Sequence Checks |

#### 1. General Information About Paper Claims Folders Storage and Control

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| Introduction | This topic contains an overview of paper claims folders storage and management, including   * general policies for storing paper claims folders * organizing paper claims folders numerically, and * Dependents’ Educational Assistance (DEA) and Counseling/Evaluation/Rehabilitation (CER) paper claims folders. |

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| Change Date | June 10, 2015 |

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| a. General Policies for Storing Paper Claims Folders | Adhere to the policies below for storing claimant or beneficiary paper claims folders.   * Store paper claims folders *only* in designated cabinets. * Do *not* store paper claims folders in desks or other unauthorized places. * Do *not* remove claimant/beneficiary paper claims folders from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) premises for any purpose unless authorized by regional office (RO) management. * Paper claims folders stored at an offsite facility are considered *on VA premises* and must be treated accordingly. RO management must ensure * the offsite location, whether a government or private facility, meets all onsite security requirements and standards, and * all paper claims folders are tracked in the Control of Veterans Records System (COVERS).   ***References***:For more information on   * establishing claims folder numbers, see M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 3.A * determining paper claims folder jurisdiction, see M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 5.A, and * transferring paper claims folders, see * M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 5.D, and * M23-1, Part I, Chapter 14. |

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| b. Organizing Paper Claims Folders Numerically | When storing paper claims folders, organize them first based on the terminal (last two) digits of the claims folder number that each folder bears and then numerically within each set of terminal digits.  ***Notes***:   * Depending on a when a paper claims folder was first established, the claims folder number will be either the Veteran’s eight-digit claim number or nine-digit Social Security number (SSN). * Interfile paper claims folders bearing an SSN as the claims folder number with those bearing a claim number as the claims folder number. * Disregard leading zeroes in the claims folder number when numerically organizing paper claims folders within each set of terminal digits. * When two paper claims folders have similar claims folder numbers, one bearing an *SSN* as the claims folder number and the other bearing a *claim number* as the claims folder number, place the paper claims folder bearing the eight-digit claim number *before* the one bearing the nine-digit SSN. |

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| c. DEA and CER Paper Claims Folders | The regional processing offices (RPOs) in Atlanta, Buffalo, Muskogee and St. Louis establish and maintain all Dependents’ Educational Assistance (DEA) folders, *which are now all paperless*.  ***Exception***: The Manila RO maintains DEA paper claims folders as a separate file series for those DEA recipients attending school in the Philippines.  Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) divisions establish and maintain their own Counseling/Evaluation/Rehabilitation (CER) paper claims folders at their respective ROs. |

#### 2. Misfiled Paper Claims Folders

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| Introduction | This topic contains information about misfiled paper claims folders, including   * definition of a misfiled paper claims folder * checking for misfiled paper claims folders * handling a misfiled paper claims folder, and * action to take if the Beneficiary Identification and Records Locator Subsystem (BIRLS) shows a different paper claims folder location. |

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| Change Date | October 10, 2012 |

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| a. Definition: Misfiled Paper Claims Folder | A ***misfiled paper claims folder*** is a paper claims folder that is *not* stored in the proper numerical sequence. |

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| b. Checking for Misfiled Paper Claims Folders | Check for misfiled paper claims folders during   * normal paper claims folder servicing (such as dropping mail, pulling folders, etc.) * paper claims folder sequencing checks * reconciliation of paper claims folders in *locked files* * paper claims folder retirement projects, and * other special projects that require the handling/rearrangement of paper claims folders located in locked files or the RO’s general paper claims folder storage area (commonly referred to as the *file bank*).   ***Reference***: For more information about paper claims folders locked files, see M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.A.3.a. |

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| c. Handling a Misfiled Paper Claims Folder | After finding a misfiled paper claims folder,   * attempt to locate the *VA Form 3025, File Charge Card*, that belongs to the paper claims folder, and * follow the instructions in the table. below. |

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| If the charge card … | Then … |
| shows a request for circularization | send an e-mail to [VAVBASTL/RMC/CIR](mailto:CIR.VBARMC@va.gov) to notify the Records Management Center (RMC) that the missing paper claims folder has been located. |
| indicates that a rebuilt paper claims folder is located at the RO | follow the instructions in M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.D.1.d. |
| * does *not* exist, or * does *not* indicate the existence of a * circularized paper claims folder, or * rebuilt paper claims folder | * use the Beneficiary Identification and Records Locator Subsystem (BIRLS) inquiry in Share to determine what BIRLS shows as the paper claims folder’s current location, and * follow the instructions in the table below.  |  |  | | --- | --- | | If BIRLS shows the paper claims folder location as … | Then … | | the RO | return the paper claims folder and charge card to their proper location in storage. | | another RO | follow the instructions in M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.A.2.d. | |

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| ***References***: For more information about   * missing paper claims folders, see M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.D, and * using BIRLS, see the [*Share User’s Guide*](http://css.vba.va.gov/SHARE/). |

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| d. Action to Take if BIRLS Shows a Different Paper Claims Folder Location | If BIRLS shows another RO as the current location of a misfiled paper claims folder,   * check with the other RO to determine if another paper claims folder exists, and * follow the instructions in the table below. |

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| If another paper claims folder … | Then … |
| exists | transfer the misfiled paper claims folder to the RO with possession of the other paper claims folder. That RO is then responsible for   * consolidating the paper claims folders, and * notifying the RMC via e-mail ([VAVBASTL/RMC/RCD](mailto:RCD.VBARMC@va.gov)) when consolidation is complete.   ***Note***: Upon receipt of notification, the RMC will remove the rebuilt paper claims folder indicator in BIRLS. |
| does *not* exist | the RO with current, physical custody of the misfiled paper claims folder is responsible for updating COVERS (which, in turn, updates BIRLS) to reflect the correct location of the paper claims folder. |

#### 3. Paper Claims Folders Requiring Restricted Access and Employee Certification of Veteran Status

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| Introduction | This topic contains information on locked files, including   * definition of locked files * location of locked files * responsibility for managing locked files * releasing paper claims folder records stored in locked files * organizing and controlling paper claims folders in locked files, and * paper claims folders that must be stored in locked files. |

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| Change Date | December 17, 2015 |

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| a. Definition: Locked Files | The term ***locked files*** represents a locked room or locked cabinet(s) where ROs must secure paper claims folders to which access is restricted.  ***Note***: This definition, and the requirement to lock this category of records in a room or cabinet, also applies to paper claims folders the RO maintains at offsite facilities. |

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| b. Location of Locked Files | Locked files must be located in, or in close proximity to, the office of the Veterans Service Center Manager (VSCM) or Pension Management Center Manager (PMCM). |

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| c. Responsibility for Managing Locked Files | The VSCM/PMCM or his/her designee is the sole custodian of *all* material stored in locked files and is responsible for the proper handling of it. Specific responsibilities include   * filing, safeguarding, and releasing (upon proper request) paper claims folders stored in locked files, and * maintaining a log showing the * date of removal of a paper claims folder from locked files * claims folder number associated with the paper claims folder * name of the employee with temporary custody of the paper claims folder, and * date of return of the paper claims folder to locked files.   ***Important***:   * Paper claims folders removed from locked files must be returned by the end of each business day. * If a document is added to or removed from a paper claims folder in locked files, the log referenced in this block must be updated to show the folder was charged out and back in, even if the folder never left the locked files area. |

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| d. Releasing Paper Claims Folders Stored in Locked Files | A paper claims folder stored in locked files may be released *only* to   * Veterans Service Center (VSC) or Pension Management Center (PMC) employees with a business need to access the record * the chief (or properly designated alternate) of the division requiring use of the record, or * the beneficiary’s or claimant’s recognized service organization or other power of attorney.   ***Important***: The individual or entity to which the paper claims folder is released is responsible for   * safeguarding the paper claims folder while in its custody, and * returning the paper claims folder to locked files by the end of each day. |

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| e. Organizing and Controlling Paper Claims Folders in Locked Files | Organize paper claims folders in locked files according to the instructions in M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.A.1.b. Control the movement of paper claims folders in and out of locked files by updating   * the log referenced in M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.A.3.c * COVERS, and (as a local option) * update the *VA Form 3025*.   ***Reference***: For more information about updating *VA Form 3025*, see M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.A.7.c. |

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| f. Paper Claims Folders That Must Be Stored in Local Locked Files | Paper claims folders that must be stored in an RO’s locked files  include   * the paper claims folders described in M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.A.4.c, and * the paper claims folders of Veterans who are * currently employed by the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) or National Cemetery Administration (NCA) who * are co-located with VBA offices, or * interact regularly with VBA employees (such as VHA physicians who conduct examinations on a regular basis) * currently employed as a Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) contractor * a relative of a VBA contractor, or * a celebrity or an individual about whom there is significant public/media interest, such as a candidate for a prominent public office.   ***Important***: RO and VSC/PMC management may choose to secure other records in local locked files simply because of the nature of their content.  ***Reference***: See the notes in M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.A.4.a for the definition of a relative. |

**4. Storing Paper Claims Folders at a Restricted-Access Claims Center (RACC)**

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| Introduction | This topic contains information on storing paper claims folders at a restricted access-claims center (RACC), including   * paper claims folders that must be stored at a RACC * storing other paper claims folders at a RACC * exceptions to the policy regarding the storage of paper claims folders at a RACC * paper claims folders that ROs store in locked files only until they receive a claim or NOD * RACC locations, jurisdiction, and addresses * temporary transfer of a paper claims folder from a RACC to an RO * Veterans service organization (VSO) interaction with RACCs * means of identifying paper claims folders that must be stored in locked files or at a RACC * *VA Forms 20-0344,* *Annual Certification of Veteran Status and Veteran-Relatives*, requiring RO action * annual recertification requirement, and * disposition of the paper claims folder after death or after employment ends. |

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| **Change Date** | December 17, 2015 |

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| **a. Paper Claims Folders That Must Be Stored at an RACC** | A Veteran’s paper claims folder must be stored at one of the restricted-access claims centers (RACCs) listed in M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.A.4.e if he/she is a   * current or former VBA employee * current or former intern or participant in a VA work-study program who works in close proximity to VBA employees * relative of one of the individuals specified in the preceding two bullets * Veteran on whose service a current or former non-Veteran, VBA employee’s VA benefits are based * current employee or relative of a current employee of a veterans service organization (VSO), or * high-ranking government official, to specifically include those requiring the assignment of a sensitivity level of 8 or 9, as shown in the table below. |

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| **Level of Sensitivity and Sensitivity Expiration Date** | **VA Records Including Employees, Veterans or Their Beneficiaries** | **Authorized Employees** |
| Level 9 Sensitivity  Sensitivity expiration date: Indefinite | * The President/Vice President of the U.S. * Members of the Cabinet * U.S. Senators and Members of Congress * U.S. Supreme Court Justices * VA Secretary * VA Deputy Secretaries * VA Under Secretaries * VA Assistant Secretaries * other high profile individuals * special cases, e.g. witness protection | * Under Secretary for Benefits (USB) * Deputy USBs * Service Directors * SIPO Director * Directors and Assistant Directors of facilities having jurisdiction over records with a level of sensitivity equal to 9 |
| Level 8 Sensitivity  Sensitivity expiration date: three years after leaving public office | * VA Senior Executive Service * Directors and Assistant Directors * Regional Counsel * Division Chiefs or equivalent * persons of national prominence * Governors * Lt. Governors * Attorneys General of states or commonwealths * locally prominent persons or officials | * Facility Directors and assistants * Area Directors * VSC Managers and Assistants * all other Division Chiefs |
| Level 7 Sensitivity  Sensitivity expiration date VBA employees: three years after leaving public/  government service | VBA employees | * Information Security Officers (ISOs), Assistant ISOs, and System Security Officers * Supervisory Accredited VSO representatives * all VA Supervisors with a business need * 10% of VBA entities’ non-supervisory staff with a business need. |
| Level 6 Sensitivity  Sensitivity expiration date: three years after leaving public/  government service | * VA Employees (other than VBA employees) * VSO employees * relative of employee * VA work-study/interns employed at a VBA location * at the Director’s discretion, this sensitivity level may also be placed on a Veteran’s folder for high-profile claims. | * Journey level employees having a business need on a daily basis, not to exceed 25% of a VBA entities’ non-supervisory staff * non-supervisory accredited VSO representatives. |
| Level 5 Sensitivity  Sensitivity expiration date private attorney fee cases: until the Attorney Fee designation for a particular claim no longer exists | private attorney fee cases | * Private Attorneys * all VA Supervisors with a business need * 10% of VBA entities’ non-supervisory staff with a business need. |
| Level 4 Sensitivity | Local Use Determination |  |
| Level 3 Sensitivity | Local Use Determination |  |
| Level 2 Sensitivity | Local Use Determination |  |
| Level 1 Sensitivity | Local Use Determination |  |
| Level 0 Sensitivity | Open files (accessible by all VA employees) |  |

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| ***Exceptions***: For exceptions on the policy described in the above paragraph, see M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.A.4.c.  ***Notes***:   * A *relative*, for the purpose of this section, includes a living *or deceased* spouse, child, parent, or sibling. * RO management may choose to store a Veteran’s paper claims folder at a RACC for reasons other than those described in this block. * If a paper claims folder meets the criteria for storage in local locked files ***and*** at a RACC, store the paper claims folder at a RACC.   ***References***: For more information on   * handling claims from employees and their relatives, see M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii,1.C.5 * the length of time paper claims folders must remain at a RACC for *former* employees, see M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.A.4.k, and * storing paper claims folders at a RACC for reasons other than those described in this block, see M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii. 4.A.4.b. |

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| b. Storing Other Paper Claims Folders at a RACC | If RO management chooses to store a Veteran’s paper claims folder at a RACC for reasons other than those described in M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.A.4.a (such as a conflict of interest), the VSCM, PMCM or a designee must e-mail the appropriate RACC a formal memorandum containing the following:   * reason for categorizing the paper claims folder as *sensitive*, and * rationale for storing the paper claims folder at a RACC.   ***Reference***: For a list of RACCs and their e-mail addresses, see M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.A.4.e. |

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| c. Exceptions to the Policy Regarding the Storage of Paper Claims Folders at a RACC | The table below describes exceptions to the policy expressed in M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.A.4.a regarding the storage of paper claims folders at a RACC. |

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| If ... | Then the paper claims folder will be stored in the locked files of ... |
| the paper claims folder is associated with a claim for pension, burial benefits, or Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) | the PMC of origination. |
| an attorney-fee agreement is in place | the station of origination (SOO). |
| the claim is restricted access due to high-level media inquiries | the SOO. |
| the paper claims folder is associated with a claim that is being or will be processed in a pilot program | the SOO. |
| the paper claims folder is associated with a claim that is being or will be processed as part of a *special mission*, such as   * Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) * Quick Start (QS), and * Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES)   . | an RO (other than the one where the claimant is employed) that processes the same type of claim.  ***Example***: If a claimant working at the Winston-Salem RO has a QS claim pending, his/her paper claims folder must be stored at the San Diego RO.  ***Reference***: For more information about pre-discharge, claims-processing programs, see M21-1, Part III, Subpart i, Chapter 2. |
| * the Veteran’s record has been assigned a sensitivity level of 6, and * storage of the corresponding paper claims folder in local locked files is ***not*** mandated * under M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.A.3.f, or * for any of the other reasons stated in this table | the SOO *until* a claim or notice of disagreement (NOD) is filed.  ***References***: For more information on   * handling claims and NODs associated with a paper claims folder that meets the conditions described in this row, see M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.A.4.d, and * the assignment of sensitivity levels to Veterans’ records, seeM21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.A.4.a. |

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| d. Paper Claims Folders That ROs Store in Locked Files Only Until They Receive a Claim or NOD | If an RO is storing a paper claims folder in its locked files only until it receives an associated claim or NOD (as discussed in the bottom row of the table in M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.A.4.c), the RO must take the actions described in the table below within ***five days*** of receipt of such a claim or NOD. |

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| Step | Action |
| 1 | Verify the validity of the assigned sensitivity level with the RO’s ISO. |
| 2 | Follow the instructions in the table below.   |  |  | | --- | --- | | If the correspondence the RO received represents ... | Then ... | | a claim | place the claim under end product (EP) control. | | an NOD | * place the claim under EP control (EP 170) * create a record in the Veterans Appeals Control and Locator System (VACOLS) * transfer the appeal (in VACOLS) to the appropriate RACC, using the station numbers provided in M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.A.4.e.   ***Reference***: For information about using VACOLS, see the [*VACOLS User’s Guide*](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/21/publicat/Users/Index.htm#bmv). | |
| 3 | Add the *Restricted Access* corporate flash to the corresponding corporate record. |
| 4 | Permanently transfer the paper claims folder and correspondence to the appropriate RACC. |

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| e. RACC Locations, Jurisdiction, and Addresses | The table below displays the   * name and VACOLS station number of each of the three RACCs * paper claims folders over which each RACC has jurisdiction, and * the mailing and e-mail address of each RACC. |

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| Name | Jurisdiction | Address |
| St. Paul RACC (RO76) | * all ROs ***except*** the ROs in * Milwaukee * Des Moines * St. Paul, and * Denver/Cheyenne * all area offices ***except*** Central Area * Appeals Management Center * all human resources centers ***except*** the Detroit Human Resources Center * VBA Central Office, and * any other office/center not specifically assigned to the Milwaukee or Philadelphia RACCs. | ***Mailing***:  St. Paul VA Regional Office  Bishop Henry Whipple Federal Building  Restricted Access Claims Center (RO 076)  PO Box 11940  St. Paul, MN 55111  ***E-Mail***: [VAVBASPL/RO/RACC](mailto:RACC.VBASPL@va.gov) |
| Milwaukee RACC (RO75) | * St. Paul RO, and * Denver/Cheyenne RO. | ***Mailing***:  Milwaukee VA Regional Office  Restricted Access Claims Center (RO 075)  5400 W National Avenue  Milwaukee, WI 53214  ***E-Mail***: [VAVBAMIW/RO/RACC](mailto:RACC.VBAMIW@va.gov) |
| Philadelphia RACC (RO74) | * Milwaukee RO * Des Moines RO * Detroit Human Resources Center, and * Central Area Office. | ***Mailing***:  Philadelphia Regional Office  Restricted Access Claims Center (RO 074)  5000 Wissahickon Avenue  Philadelphia, PA 19101  ***E-Mail***: [VAVBAPHI/RO/RACC](mailto:RACC.VBAPHI@VA.GOV) |

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| f. Temporary Transfer of a Paper Claims Folder From a RACC to an RO | If a RACC transfers a paper claims folder back to the SOO (for an examination, personal hearing, etc.), the receiving RO must ensure   * the VSCM is aware of the transfer * the transfer was for a valid reason and is only temporary * the paper claims folder is secured in locked files * any necessary local action is taken immediately, and * the paper claims folder is returned to the RACC as quickly as possible.     ***Reference***: For more information about handling claims from employees and their relatives, see M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 1.C.5. |

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| g. VSO Interaction With RACCs | If a VSO has a question regarding a claim that a RACC is processing, the VSO may contact the RACC by e-mail, using the e-mail addresses shown in M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.A.4.e. |

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| h. Means of Identifying Paper Claims Folders That Must Be Stored in Locked Files or at a RACC | The individuals listed below must complete *VA Form 20-0344,* *Annual Certification of Veteran Status and Veteran-Relatives*, on the first day of employment/reemployment at, or transfer into, an RO   * VA employees and contractors * VSO employees * VA interns, and * participants in VA work-study programs.   ***Notes***:   * The individuals listed in the above paragraph are responsible for immediately notifying their supervisors (who, in turn, must notify the RO’s ISO) if a paper claims folder is created for them or a relative *after* employment begins. * Human Resources Liaisons at each RO are responsible for notifying the ISO if an employee, intern, or work-study participant stops working for VBA or transfers out of the RO. * Each RO must establish local procedures to ensure the RO and ISO are timely notified of the termination of employment or transfer of any non-VBA employee for whom the RO possesses a *VA Form 20-0344*. * Each RO must * establish a local policy for periodically reviewing a list (obtainable from the local ISO) of all paper claims folders in its custody that require storage in locked files or at a RACC, and * relocate any paper claims folders that are being stored in the wrong location. |

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| i. VA Forms 20-0344 Requiring RO Action | The table below describes the action an RO must take when an employee indicates on *VA Form 20-0344* that he/she   * is a Veteran, and/or * has a relative who is a Veteran.   ***Note***: For the purposes of this block, an employee includes any of the individuals listed in M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.A.4.a. |

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| Step | Action |
| 1 | The RO’s ISO prepares *VA Form 20-0344a*, *Notification of an Employee or Employee-Relative Claims File*, for the paper claims folder of each   * employee who is a Veteran, and * Veteran who is the relative of an employee.   ***Exception***: The ISO does ***not*** prepare *VA Form 20-0334a* for   * the paper claims folders of relatives of VA employees in *non*-VBA positions, or * electronic claims folders (eFolders). (If an eFolder exists, the ISO will note this on the corresponding *VA Form 20-0344*.) |
| 2 | If the employee is a Veteran, the ISO links his/her claim number to his/her VBA computer system account (if an account exists).  ***Note***: If a non-Veteran employee is receiving VA benefits as a dependent of a Veteran, the ISO links that Veteran’s claim number to the employee’s VBA computer system account. |
| 3 | The ISO assigns the appropriate level of sensitivity to each Veteran’s eFolder.  ***Example***: eFolders exist in   * Virtual VA * BIRLS * the Veterans Service Network (VETSNET), and * the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS). |
| 4 | The ISO routes a photocopy of each *VA Form 20-0334a* to the VSCM/PMCM of the RO where the corresponding paper claims folder is located. |
| 5 | Upon receipt of *VA Form 20-0334a*, the VSCM/PMCM or a designee   * pulls the Veteran’s paper claims folder * reverse files the form on the right-hand flap, and * relocates the paper claims folder according to instructions in M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.A.3.f and M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.A.4.a. |

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| ***Important***: If the provisions of M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.A.4.a require storage of a new employee’s paper claims folder at a RACC, the RO with custody of the paper claims folder is responsible for transferring the folder to the appropriate RACC within ***five business days*** of the date the employee reports for his/her first day of work. |

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| j. Annual Recertification Requirement | VBA requires the same individuals listed in M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.A.4.h to annually recertify   * their status as a Veteran, and * the existence of relatives (living or deceased) who are Veterans.   Individuals may recertify by submitting a signed memorandum or a digitally signed e-mail ***unless*** any of the information *VA Form 20-0344* requests has changed since the last submission. If the information has changed, VBA requires completion and resubmission of the form. |

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| k. Disposition of the Paper Claims Folder After Death or After Employment Ends | The table below describes the process that takes place once storage at the RACC or in locked files is no longer required because of death or termination of employment.  ***Important***: The paper claims folder of a former VBA employee and his/her relative(s) must remain at the RACC for *three years after*   * employment ends, or * the employee or relative dies. |

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| Stage | Description |
| 1 | The ISO at the RO where the employee worked takes the actions described in the table below:   |  |  | | --- | --- | | If ... | Then the ISO ... | | * employment ended, or * the employee died | * enters the date employment ended or the date of death (whichever is applicable) in Part II of the *VA Form 20-0344a* the ISO initially created for the * employee, and/or * employee’s relative(s), and * routes the form to the RACC or VSCM/PMCM of the RO with custody of the corresponding paper claims folder. | | the relative of an employee died | * enters the date of death in Part II of the relative’s *VA Form 20-0344a*, and * routes the form to the RACC or VSCM/PMCM of the RO with custody of the relative’s paper claims folder. | |
| 2 | Upon receipt of *VA Form 20-0344a*, the RACC or VSCM/PMCM (or designee) of the RO with custody of the paper claims folder files down the form in the corresponding paper claims folder. |
| 3 | * If a RACC has custody of the paper claims folder, the RACC permanently transfers the paper claims folder back to the location from which it originated (an RO or VA’s RMC). * If an RO has custody of the paper claims folder, the VSCM/PMCM (or a designee) moves the paper claims folder out of locked files and into the RO’s general file bank. |

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| ***Important***:   * The date of departure of an employee on terminal sick leave does ***not*** represent the date employment ended. * ROs may ***not*** transfer out paper claims folders to another RO based *solely* on receipt of *VA Form 20-0344a*. |

#### 5. Safeguarding Records Containing Restricted Information

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| a. Handling Paper Claims Folders Containing Restricted Information | Follow the steps in the table below upon identification of a paper claims folder containing information that is of such a confidential nature that   * restricting access to the record is warranted, and * filing the record in a paper claims folder would not adequately safeguard it from being accessed by those without a business need to view it.   ***Example***: A confidential report from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. |

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| Step | Action |
| 1 | Place the record containing restricted information in an opaque and windowless envelope. |
| 2 | Label the front of the envelope with the claim number and a brief description of the envelope’s contents. |
| 3 | * Complete *VA Form 3797, Cross Reference to Confidential Report*, indicating the existence and location of the restricted record, and * file the form on the inside, left flap of the paper claims folder or other file involved.   ***Important***:   * *VA Form 3797* must remain on top of all other material in the paper claims folder at all times. * If the paper claims folder is temporarily unavailable when *VA Form 3797* is completed, retain the form in the same storage location vacated by the paper claims folder. |
| 4 | Secure the restricted paper claims folder in locked files.  ***Reference***: For more information about locked files, see M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.A.3.a. |

#### 6. Records Pertaining to Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) or Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), Alcohol Abuse, Drug Abuse, or Sickle Cell Anemia

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| Introduction | This topic contains information about handling records pertaining to human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) or acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), alcohol abuse, drug abuse, or sickle cell anemia, including   * confidentiality requirement under 38 U.S.C. 7332 * VHA responsibilities for identifying and maintaining certain original VA Records * copies of records on loan from VHA * records a claimant or beneficiary submits to an RO * other records that may be kept in the paper claims folder, and * Power of attorney (POA) access to confidential records. |

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| Change Date | June 10, 2015 |

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| a. Confidentiality Requirement Under 38 U.S.C. 7332 | The statutory guidelines of [38 U.S.C. 7332](http://law.cornell.edu/uscode/html/uscode38/usc_sec_38_00007332----000-.html) require the confidentiality of VA records pertaining to human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) or acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), alcohol abuse, drug abuse, or sickle cell anemia.  This statue also requires the confidentiality of information received, obtained, or maintained by an employee or contractor of VA for the purpose of performing HIV, AIDS, alcoholism, drug abuse, or sickle cell anemia program functions regarding an identifiable patient.  For the purpose of this block, a program function includes   * treatment * rehabilitation * education * training * evaluation, and * research. |

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| b. VHA Responsibilities for Identifying and Maintaining Certain Original VA Records | VHA is responsible for identifying and permanently maintaining any original VA records pertaining to HIV or AIDS, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, or sickle cell anemia.  VHA specifically identifies these records as falling under the purview of [38 U.S.C. 7332](http://law.cornell.edu/uscode/html/uscode38/usc_sec_38_00007332----000-.html). |

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| c. Copies of Records on Loan From VHA | For the purpose of processing benefit claims, VHA *loans* copies of records pertaining to HIV or AIDS, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, or sickle cell anemia to the RO.  RO personnel must   * make no additional copies of these records, and * destroy the copies in accordance with [*RCS VB-1, Part I, Item No. 13-052.300*](http://www.benefits.va.gov/WARMS/docs/admin20/rcs/part1/sec13.doc) after completing adjudication or other proceedings. |

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| d. Records a Claimant or Beneficiary Submits to an RO | It is acceptable for an RO to keep VA records pertaining to HIV or AIDS, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, or sickle cell anemia in a claimant’s or beneficiary’s paper claims folder if the claimant or beneficiary submits them to the RO. However, the RO must advise the claimant/beneficiary that because the RO may request and obtain copies of the same records from the VA medical facility having custody of them, the records do not need to remain in the paper claims folder unless the claimant/beneficiary so desires.  ***Important***: Do *not* disclose the records without the claimant’s/beneficiary’s consent. Send him/her *VA Form 10-5345, Request for and Authorization to Release Medical Records or Health Information*, if consent is necessary. |

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| e. Other Records That May Be Kept in the Paper Claims Folder | It is acceptable to keep the following records pertaining to HIV or AIDS, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, or sickle cell anemia in a paper claims folder:   * reports of VA examinations conducted for the purpose of evaluating HIV or AIDS, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, or sickle cell anemia (The provisions of [38 U.S.C. 7332](http://.law.cornell.edu/uscode/html/uscode38/usc_sec_38_00007332----000-.html) do not apply to these reports.), and * records pertaining to HIV or AIDS, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, or sickle cell anemia that originated from non-VA programs.   ***Important***: Do *not* disclose these records without the claimant’s/beneficiary’s consent. |

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| f. POA Access to Confidential Records | A representative holding a valid power of attorney (POA) may ***not*** access records pertaining to HIV or AIDS, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, or sickle cell anemia unless the claimant has   * submitted a signed statement granting access, or * specifically authorized access on * *VA Form 21-22, Appointment of Veterans Service Organization as Claimant’s Representative* * *VA Form 21-22a, Appointment of Individual as Claimant’s Representative*, or * *VA Form 10-5345, Request for and Authorization to Release Medical Records or Health Information*. |

#### 7. Control of Paper Claims Folders

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| Introduction | This topic contains information about the control of paper claims folders, including   * tracking paper claims folders using COVERS * schedule for updating COVERS * tracking the removal of paper claims folders from the file bank * requisitioning individual paper claims folders, and * tracking the movement of paper claims folders outside their normal storage area. |

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| Change Date | June 10, 2015 |

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| a. Tracking Paper Claims Folders Using COVERS | All ROs must use COVERS to track the location of paper claims folders. This includes paper claims folders an RO moves to an offsite, government- or privately-owned storage facility.  Individual ROs may customize the names they assign to most paper claims folder locations in COVERS to fit their individual circumstances and needs. The more specific the location and its corresponding name, the more useful COVERS will be in locating paper claims folders.  ***Examples***: An RO may identify the location of paper claims folders it   * sets aside for local quality review by naming the location *QRVIEW*, or * moves to a Federal records center by naming the location *FRC*.   ***Reference***: For information about using COVERS, see the [*COVERS User Guide*](http://css.vba.va.gov/COVERS/). |

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| b. Schedule for Updating COVERS | RO management must ensure all paper claims folders that are charged out of the file bank are *scanned* at least once each week to ensure the current location of these folders is correctly reflected in COVERS. |

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| c. Tracking the Removal of Paper Claims Folders From the File Bank | Always update COVERS when removing a paper claims folder from the file bank.  In addition to COVERS, ROs may also choose to update *VA Form 3025*, to reflect the   * mail routing symbol of the organizational element to which the paper claims folder will be delivered * type of mail or form number that necessitated pulling the paper claims folder * date the paper claims folder was pulled from storage, and * initials of the person who pulled the paper claims folder. |

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| d. Requisitioning Individual Paper Claims Folders | To requisition individual paper claims folders, use either   * COVERS, or * *VA Form 3770, Request for Numbered Folder/Notice of Recharge*.   ***Note***: As required, *VA Form 3770* may also serve as a record of paper claims folders located within an operating element. |

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| e. Tracking the Movement of Paper Claims Folders Outside Their Normal Storage Area | Update COVERS to reflect the movement of individual paper claims folders from one organizational element to another or, within an operating element, from one individual to another.  ***Notes***: If COVERS is unavailable, use *VA Form 3770*. |

#### 8. Sequence Checks

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| Introduction | This topic contains information on sequence checks, including   * definition of *file sequence check* * schedule for conducting sequence checks, and * steps for conducting a sequence check. |

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| Change Date | June 10, 2015 |

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| a. Definition: File Sequence Check | A ***file sequence check*** consists of a review of paper claims folders in the file bank and locked files to ensure   * every paper claims folder is in strict numerical sequence within each terminal digit, and * DEA folders are properly interfiled with paper claims folders.   ***Note***: Active DEA folders used by the RPOs in Atlanta, Buffalo, Muskogee, and St. Louis are now all paperless. |

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| b. Schedule for Conducting Sequence Checks | RO management must establish a schedule to ensure completion of a sequence check of all paper claims folders in the file bank and locked files at least once a year. |

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| c. Steps for Conducting a Sequence Check | Follow the steps in the table below when conducting a sequence check. |

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| Step | Action |
| 1 | Remove charge cards that are eligible for disposal. |
| 2 | Pull and fix paper claims folders in need of repair. |
| 3 | Shift paper claims folders to avoid overcrowding. |
| 4 | Maintain documentation of the sequence checks performed. |