

**Report of the Ad Hoc Committee to Define Criteria for Disposal  
Prior to a 5 year Retention**

**To: Judy Russell, Superintendent of Documents**

**From: AD-Hoc Committee to Define Criteria for Disposal Prior to a 5 year Retention**

**Date: July 9, 2004**

**1) Problem Statement**

A number of selective depository libraries have expressed concern over the current disposition guidelines for undesired tangible depository materials; retention that is mandated by 44 USC 1911-1912. Although long a concern in the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) this issue has recently come into sharper focus as FDLP participants contend with a combination of issues facing them in their home institutions. These include but are not limited to: changes in staffing levels; increased pressure to “justify” space requirements to library administrators and the growing reliance of the user community on electronic government information.

At the spring 2004 meeting of the Depository Library Council a number of additional factors were cited by participants.

1. The distribution of tangible material with minimal intellectual value to the majority of selective depositories, such as bookmarks, outdated program announcements, brochures, and folders or notebooks without content.
2. The current item selection system does not provide a level of selectivity that will ensure undesired material is not received.
3. The inadequate review of item selection profile by depository staff, resulting in selections that do not meet the libraries’ collection development requirements.
4. The lack of familiarity with current program guidelines that allow for the disposal of certain categories of material before the 5 year period. (Superseded List guidelines).
5. The lack of guidance or inaccurate instructions provided by Regional Depositories on retention and disposal procedures, creating a lack of uniform standards across the FDLP.
6. The guidelines for disposal of eligible material established by many Regionals require selective depositories to expend considerable staff resources preparing

material for disposal, resulting in the retention of material that could be disposed of but is not because of inadequate resources.

7. The inflexible retention guidelines, which do not accommodate changes in the collection development profile of a depository library.

## **2) Ad-Hoc Committee Response**

GPO has proposed new statutory language to 44 USC 1911 to address problems associated with the current retention guidelines. The amendment eliminates the 5 year requirement for selective depositories, and amends the law to allow retention periods “as authorized by the Superintendent of Documents.” GPO's intention is to develop guidelines that would allow certain categories of material to be disposed of prior to 5 years as authorized by the Superintendent of Documents.

While this proposal is one solution to the problem of undesired material in selective depository collections further analysis of the factors outlined above result in a number of additional solutions that should be pursued by GPO to address the concerns of depository libraries. Many of these solutions do not appear to require statutory change while directly addressing and correcting the situation.

It is possible that selective depositories expressing frustration with the receipt and retention of undesired tangible materials may not be fully aware of the opportunities within the existing program guidelines. Increasing awareness, through education, of the options already available is one immediate and easily pursued option for GPO to consider. Additionally, as Regionals now possess flexibility in the format selections (e.g. microfiche or paper for Congressional hearings) this same flexibility should be extended to all selective libraries as well.

Furthermore, the Committee believes that the proposed amendment is not required for GPO to attain the flexibility needed to respond to the concerns of FDLP participants. Since depositories are already allowed to dispose of superseded material, it is possible that a more expansive interpretation of the term “superseded” to include availability in alternative (ideally electronic) formats, would be sufficient and would not require statutory change.

The shift to a more electronic depository library program suggests that over the course of the next few years the distribution of undesired tangible materials will continue to decline. Additionally, much of the undesired material already in FDLP collections will shortly be eligible for discard under the existing 5 year schedule. This again, would seem to negate the need for a change in the statutory language.

The Committee is particularly concerned about the shift away from the depository material retention period established by statute to one based upon the discretion of the Superintendent of Documents. The transfer of this authority to an office subject to political appointment holds the potential to endanger the long established goal of the

FDLP and GPO, working as partners, to develop geographically disbursed, rich collections of current and historical government information designed to meet the needs of a variety of user communities.

Having outlined our concerns, the Committee submits the following recommendations, in accordance with its charge, for consideration.

### **3) Ad-Hoc Committee Recommendation (near-term)**

A. That GPO work with the FDLP to implement the following criteria that identify and facilitate the disposal of undesired tangible depository material received and would allow the disposal of this material prior to the five year requirement now in force. While the Committee questions the need for statutory change, the Committee recognizes the following recommendations may in fact require a change in the statutory language. We urge GPO seek legal council's advice on this matter prior to any further pursuit of statutory language changes.

1. Material with negligible relevant information content and/or format would be eligible; examples include bookmarks, posters, brochures, and folders or notebooks. With the exception of posters, it is currently difficult to identify the depository item numbers associated with the above categories of material. Often these items are distributed under a "General Publications" item numbers and thus cannot be easily identified and separated.
2. Material that has been identified by GPO to have an equivalent electronic version and has been archived by GPO with a presumption of guaranteed permanent public access. One possible solution that we ask GPO to consider is an indication on Depository Shipping Lists that will identify this category of material.
3. Material distributed under an item number that has been dropped from a depository's item selection profile but has been in the collection for less than 5 years. We recommend that GPO develop a mechanism to ensure that the Regionals are consulted before disposing of this category of material.
4. GPO should update and re-issue the Instructions to Depository Libraries and the Federal Depository Library Manual to reflect any changes in depository procedures and process, including the proposed withdrawal criteria.

### **4) Additional Recommendations for GPO's Consideration (long-term)**

Develop a new method of selection, replacing the item number scheme, to improve the ability of participating libraries to select specific material. Suggested options include:

- a) title-based selection (approval plan model) [Preferred solution]

- b) category-based selection (elect not to receive posters, bookmarks, etc, regardless of subject or agency)
- c) return to Item Survey method, allowing libraries to choose item numbers before material is distributed

Provide depository staff with additional educational resources and appropriate tools to perform collection evaluation and weeding. Suggestions include:

- a) Provide instructional material in using tools such as Documents Data Miner 2 to assess distribution history of a particular item number.
- b) Reformat Superseded List to draw attention to general guidelines for material not specified by SuDoc number in the list.
- c) Devote additional resources to assure new and existing titles are regularly reviewed and added to the Superseded List as appropriate.
- d) Provide training opportunities for item selection process immediately before item selection cycle.

Mandate consistent disposal guidelines and standards by the Regionals. Suggestions include:

- a) Ensure that guidelines developed by the Regionals are reviewed by GPO for consistency with established program requirements.
- b) Promote alternative methods for the actual disposal of material by selectives, such as on site review by Regional librarian.
- c) Initiate regular oversight of Regional activities to insure that consistent advice is given to selectives and that established procedures are being followed.

Respectfully submitted,

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## APPENDIX

### **Ad Hoc Committee of Define Criteria for Disposal Prior to a 5 Year Retention**

#### **Background:**

GPO has suggested a legislative change that would remove amend Title 44 as follows:

In General. Chapter 19 of title 44, United States Code, is amended as follows:

- (a) by striking from section 1911 "after retention for five years" and inserting in lieu thereof "as authorized by the Superintendent Documents", and
- (b) by striking from section 1912 "which they have retained five years" and inserting in lieu thereof "as authorized by the Superintendent of Documents".

#### **Charge:**

Develop guidelines that will support implementation of the proposed amendment by defining the criteria to be issued by the SuDocs in lieu of the current statutory mandate to retain all tangible items for a minimum of 5 years.

#### **Assumption:**

The default is to retain tangible items for a minimum of five years as currently provided by statute. Therefore, the guidelines only need to define criteria that are to be applied to tangible items considered for disposal prior to the end of the 5 year retention period.

#### **Achieve by:**

- Develop criteria for evaluating items for disposal prior to 5 years. For example:
  - An electronic copy is available that is suitable for substitution
- Develop categories of materials eligible for disposal before 5 years. For example:
  - Ephemeral materials, such as posters, pamphlets, calendars, bookmarks (provide specific item numbers as examples)
  - Reiterate the current exceptions. i.e., dated, superseded

#### **General Guidance:**

Keep everything simple. This is a short-term issue which needs short-term solutions. Develop guidelines and criteria that will be acceptable to the FDL community.

Draft by end of Council meeting in St. Louis. Final version by ALA meeting in June. Document should not exceed 2-4 pages.