

Public Not Aware Of Importance Of Records Management, Say Academics

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SHAH ALAM, (Bernama) -- Many among the nation's six million taxpayers are probably busy completing their income tax return forms and submitting them to the Inland Revenue Board (IRB) either manually or through e-filing before the respective April 30 or May 15 deadlines.

According to the Income Tax Act 1967, taxpayers are required to retain all their tax records, documents and transaction receipts dating back to seven years to ascertain the authenticity of their claims for tax exemption and to allow comparisons to be made if necessary.

So taxpayers, have you all been diligently keeping possession of your past and present records?

Most individuals are wont to regard their transaction receipts and other documents as "useless" and, as such, tend to dispose of them to avoid cluttering their homes. Then, there are those who are dedicated to storing all their important documents in special files or cabinets.

How many people are aware that their transaction receipts and birth, marriage and academic certificates, as well as land titles, house and car hire-purchase agreements, and insurance policies can come in handy to resolve problems that may arise someday?

VITAL TO MAINTAIN RECORDS

Dr Irwan Kamaruddin Abd Kadir, who is head of the Centre for Records Management Studies at the Faculty of Information Management at Universiti Teknologi MARA's (UiTM) Puncak Perdana campus, defined a record as any note that contains vital information or any dossier of documents created in respect to a dealing. In the case of the latter, the documents are usually created serially over a period of time.

"To ensure that this record has a value, it should be complete, that is, the entire series of documents should be intact," he told Bernama in an interview, here.

Pointing out to the need for government agencies or departments to maintain historical, research, informational and evidential records, Irwan Kamaruddin said it would create value for the nation, as well as the institution concerned.

"They have to classify all the information they have and only then will they see how the records can create value. We can't deliberately invent something which has historical value... we can only come across it by chance when going through old records," he said.

KEEPING PERSONAL DOCUMENTS SAFELY

His colleague Mohd Nizam Yunus, a senior lecturer at the Centre for Records Management Studies, said efficient management of records would save time and effort for both individuals and organisations.

In the case of individuals filing their income tax returns, he said, they could face the risk of being fined or jailed if they failed to produce receipts of the books, sports equipment or computer they claimed they had bought.

"Individuals should retain all their receipts and invoices so that they can submit these to the IRB if asked to do so. This will make it easier for them to claim tax exemptions for some of their purchases," he said.

According to Section 119A of the Income Tax Act 1967, an individual faces RM300 or up to RM10,000 in fine or jail sentence, or both, if he or she is unable to produce the receipts concerned.

"And, just imagine what can happen if a person who doesn't keep his personal documents carefully tries to register his child in school. He needs his child's birth certificate but it's missing... he is then forced to go to the National Registration Department (NRD) to get a copy. Isn't this a waste of time and effort?" asked Mohd Nizam.

ITS IMPORTANCE TO AGENCIES OR DEPARTMENTS

Asso Prof Dr Aliza Ismail, who is also from UiTM's Centre for Records Management Studies, said records could serve as a source of reference or analysis in the event an organisation wound up its operations. Records could be produced in court as proof if the need arose and could also help organisations to carry out their functions smoothly, she added.

"An efficiently managed system is one that allows records or documents to be retrieved easily when it is needed," she said, adding that records management usually had three purposes - to fulfil the needs of an organisation as well as its legal and financial requirements, and to meet the needs of the community who could retrieve information from its archives for future research efforts.

Citing government hospitals, the NRD and Land and Mineral Offices as examples, Mohd Nizam said it was vital for them to maintain efficient records management systems, failing which problems could crop up and lead to disruptions in operations.

"Hospitals, for example, must keep proper records of their patients so that the doctors are aware of the medicines prescribed to the patients previously and whether or not they have any allergies to certain drugs," he said.

LOW LEVEL OF AWARENESS

Irwan Kamaruddin said in view of the low level of awareness on the importance of records management, it was vital for all sectors to give priority to this matter.

He said on the whole records management, which got off the ground in this country in 1956, has transformed from the conventional system involving storing records in files or making entries in books to an electronic system involving digital software.

Malaysia, however, uses a hybrid system, that is, a combination of conventional and electronic records management processes, he said.

Dr Aliza said financial allocations set aside by organisations for records management were largely inadequate, adding that this could be due to the common perception that records management was not a vital asset.

"These records do not produce an income and managing them entails a rather huge expenditure. But over the long-term, proper records management can guarantee the sustainability of an organisation," she added.

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