



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



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In Reply Refer To:
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Memorandum

To: Service Directorate

From: ^{Acting} Director *David Lott*

Subject: Acceptable Use of Bison Connect Electronic gChat Technology

On August 19, 2014, the Department of the Interior's Office (DOI) of the Chief Information Technology Officer (OCIO) issued OCIO Directive 2014-003 "Acceptable Use of Bison Connect Electronic gChat Technology". This Directive provides instructions on the use of Google Apps for Government (GAfG), Bison Connect instant messaging technology, known as Google Chat (gChat) and/or Hangouts (gChat).

Google Chat is an instant messaging service which provides both - text, video, and voice communication. The instant messaging service is known as "gChat". gChat is also known as "Google Chat" or "Hangouts". Messaging transactions between instant messaging users are "conversations". This new technology has provided a business tool in which the OCIO) has developed policy to instruct staff on the proper usage of gChat technology in regards to records retention requirements related to Federal records.

DOI employees and contractors should determine when to preserve gChat conversations as a Federal record. The conversations should meet the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) definition of a Federal record provided below:

- The gChat communication includes *substantive* information about the agency's functions, policies, activities, decisions, procedures, and essential transactions.
- The gChat communication furnishes the information necessary to protect the legal and financial rights of the Government and of persons directly affected by the agency's activities.

gChat conversations which are a Federal record may vary depending on whether the conversation was captured as an “on” or “off-the-record” chat. This is based on how the employee’s gChat tool is configured. Further guidance on how to delete and capture the chats was developed from the Division of Ecological Services (see attached).

Saved gChats may still be subject to other preservation/retention requirements to support litigation or other purposes even if they may not have been initially meant to be considered as a Federal record.

Employees and contractors must determine when to take actions to preserve a gChat conversation as a Federal record in accordance NARA. If the conversation is defined as a Federal record and within the record retention requirement, the gChat message must be retained as a Federal record in the appropriate record retention schedule.

All gChat conversations are not necessarily Federal records. The 36 C.F.R. 1222 and 44 U.S.C. 3101 provide the criteria regarding proper documentation to be maintained of all communicated information, whether via telephone calls, meetings, instant messages, or electronic mail exchanges. Information related to agency organization functions, policies, activities, decisions, procedures, and essential transactions of the agency which protect the legal and financial rights of the Government and employees affected by the agency’s activities, means this conversation is a Federal record. To capture this record depends upon whether the conversation was already captured as an “on” or “off” the record chat.

Attachments



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

AUG 19 2014

OCIO DIRECTIVE 2014-003

To: Heads of Bureaus and Offices

Through: Rhea Suh 
Assistant Secretary – Policy, Management and Budget

Elena Gonzalez 
Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary – Technology, Information and Business Services

From: Sylvia Burns 
Acting Chief Information Officer

Subject: Acceptable Use of BisonConnect Electronic gChat Technology

Purpose

The purpose of this Directive is to provide instructions on the acceptable use of Google Apps for Government (GAfG), BisonConnect instant messaging technology, commonly known as gChat and/or Hangouts (gChat). This Directive distinguishes between how BisonConnect gMail and gChat communications are expected to be preserved from a records management perspective. This Directive does not address other instant messaging tools that may be in use by Bureaus and/or Offices.

Background

The gChat application is one of the tools in the GAfG Software as a Service (SaaS) suite acquired by the Department of the Interior (DOI). DOI employees and contractors use gChat as a supportive business tool. Because this is new technology is now provided as a business tool through GAfG, the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) is promulgating policy to instruct staff on the proper usage of gChat technology within BisonConnect relative to records retention requirements as they relate to Federal records.

Definitions

gChat: Google Apps for Government (GAfG) BisonConnect instant messaging technology

DOI Employees: Actual on-board full or part-time Federal employees, contractors, volunteers, seasonal workers, detailees from other organizations that use BisonConnect (gChat) instant messaging tool.

Federal Records: According to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), "Records are defined in various statutes, including the Federal Records Act and the Freedom of Information Act. The definition that follows is from the Federal Records Act that governs agencies' records management responsibilities.

"Records include all books, papers, maps, photographs, machine-readable materials, or other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received by an agency of the United States Government under Federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business and preserved or appropriate for preservation by that agency or its legitimate successor as evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the Government or because of the informational value of the data in them (44 U.S.C. 3301). Many of the key terms, phrases, and concepts in this statutory definition of records are defined in CFR Part 1222.12."

Directive Requirements

DOI employees must appropriately determine when to take the necessary individual action to preserve gChat conversations as a Federal record when those conversations meet the NARA definition of a Federal record (see definitions). For purposes of records management, many gChat conversations may not be Federal records. Consequently, in general, there are no record retention requirements associated with gChat conversations other than when a given conversation meets the Federal record definition provided by NARA. If a specific gChat conversation is determined to be a Federal record, it would be managed in accordance with the appropriate records schedule.

The criteria listed below should be used to determine whether a gChat conversation constitutes a Federal record that would require the maintenance of adequate and proper documentation:

- The gChat communication includes *substantive* information about the agency's functions, policies, activities, decisions, procedures, and essential transactions.
- The gChat communication furnishes the information necessary to protect the legal and financial rights of the Government and of persons directly affected by the agency's activities.

The means to preserve a gChat conversation that constitutes a Federal record may vary depending on whether the conversation was already captured as an “on” or “off-the-record” chat based on how the employee’s gChat tool is configured. Please consult your Bureau and/or Office Records Officer for appropriate guidance regarding how and where to properly document and preserve a Federal record within your respective organization.

Where gChat conversations may have been saved by employees within their BisonConnect accounts, those saved chats may still be subject to other preservation/retention requirements to support litigation or other purposes even though they may not have initially been considered a Federal record. Those requirements will be issued separately by the appropriate Bureau and/or Office within DOI as necessary.

Effective Date

This Directive is effective immediately and maintained in effect until further notice.

Point(s) of Contact

Questions regarding this Directive, or records management requirements in general, should be directed to the [Bureau and/or Office Records Officer](#). If the questions are still unresolved, the Bureau and/or Office Records Officer should contact DOI’s Records Officer, Edwin McCeney, via email at Edwin_McCeney@ios.doi.gov, or the eRecords Program Manager, John Montel, at John_Montel@ios.doi.gov.

If you have questions regarding preservation/retention requirements relative to legal holds, please contact your Bureau and/or Office Solicitor.

Attachment 1 – Frequently Asked Questions on gChat Policy Development

cc: Assistant Directors for Information Resources
Bureau Chief Information Security Officers
Office of the Executive Secretariat
Office of the Solicitor
PMB Assistant Secretary
PMB Deputy Assistant Secretaries
DAS, Human Capital and Diversity
DOI Human Resources Officers
DOI Bureau Records Officers

Frequently Asked Questions on the gChat Policy Development

What is Google Chat?

Google Chat (gChat) is an instant messaging service that provides both text, video, and voice communication. The instant messaging service is colloquially known as “gChat”. gChat is also referred to as “Google Chat” or “Hangouts.” Messaging transactions between instant messaging users are referred to as “conversations.”

Why do we need gChat policy?

The gChat application is one of the tools in the Google Apps for Government (GAfG) Software as a Service (SaaS) suite acquired by the Department of the Interior (DOI). DOI staff use gChat as a supportive business tool. Because this is a new enterprise service being provided by DOI, OCIO is promulgating policy to instruct staff on the proper usage of gChat relative to records retention requirements as they relate to Federal records.

Audience?

The audience is DOI employees and contractors who have accounts established, and that utilize gChat technology, within BisonConnect.

What does this Directive address?

This Directive addresses the use of the BisonConnect gChat instant messaging tool. It does not address other instant messaging tools that may be in use by Bureaus and/or Offices.

Is there a difference between gChat and gMail within BisonConnect?

Yes. While gChat conversations appear in your gMail mailbox, as gMails, they are not captured in the same manner as gMail. gChat conversations are stored in the users gMail account in a folder called “Chats” and not journaled into DOI’s official records management System as the gMail email messages are.

Because of this difficulty, should DOI allow DOI staff to use the gChat tool?

Yes. However, DOI employees and contractors must be reminded that they must appropriately determine when to take their own independent actions necessary to preserve a gChat conversation as a Federal record when those conversations meet the specific requirements provided by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). If the specific nature of a conversation constitutes a Federal record and there is an associated record retention requirement, the gChat message must be retained as a Federal record within the appropriate record retention schedule. For purposes of records management, all gChat conversations are not necessarily Federal records. Consequently, from a records management perspective there are no record retention requirements associated with gChat conversations in general other than when a specific conversation meets the specific criteria provided by NARA regarding the specific nature of a conversation that constitutes a Federal record in which there is an associated record retention requirement.

The 36 C.F.R. 1222 and 44 U.S.C. 3101 provide the relevant criteria that indicate that adequate and proper documentation be maintained of any information communicated, whether via telephone calls, meetings, instant messages, or electronic mail exchanges, that include substantive information about agency organization, functions, policies, activities, decisions, procedures, and essential transactions of the agency and designed to furnish the information necessary to protect the legal and financial rights of the Government and of persons directly affected by the agency's activities. The means by which the preservation of a gChat conversation that constitutes a Federal record may be accomplished can vary and may depend on whether a conversation was already captured as an on or off the record chat.

What is the significance of gChat conversations being captured in the user's gMail account and not being journaled into DOI's official records management system?

Potential conversations that are subject to legal holds will be more difficult to capture and preserve.

Who should be contacted with questions related to gChat messages?

Questions on this Directive should be directed to the Bureau Records Officer.

How do I save a gChat message as a record in BisonConnect?

The gChat conversations are located in the "Chats" folder of the users BisonConnect account. Users can preserve responsive gChat messages in the "Chats" folder or provide it to the appropriate personnel. Detailed instruction can be obtained from each Bureau and/or Office support team office.