

Corporate Memory

As an intergovernmental organisation conducting space R&D in the public interest, ESA is endeavouring, through its records management and archives initiative, to preserve its knowledge and know-how for the benefit of its Member States, and thereby to conserve the fruits of their contributions to international cooperation in space. The Agency's achievements are being documented and the records made available – subject to established rules governing access – to all who have a legitimate interest in the European space programme. The citizens of an increasingly integrated European Union are likely in the future to demand more information and to insist on greater transparency concerning policies, decisions and, above all, public expenditure.

Certain documents, the unauthorised disclosure of which could compromise the interests of ESA, its Member States or its contractual partners, will always need special treatment, as a result of their sensitive content. The newly established ESA Security Committee is now dealing with these issues.

The Historical Record

ESA began to consolidate its archives in 1989 through a 'Contrat de dépôt' with the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence (I), which has housed, inter alia, the historical archives of the European Communities since 1984. Today, the bulk of records older than 15 years on European collaboration and joint undertakings in space are preserved at the EUI. The stories of ESA's predecessor organisations ESRO (the European Space

Research Organisation, 9465 files) and ELDO (the European Launcher Development Organisation, 4566 files) are, of course, already complete. The story of ESA itself is still being written, and its sources already consist of more than 12 127 files. Even the 'pre-history' of ESRO is documented here. All in all, the Agency's historical archives that are now in the public domain amount to more than 29 000 files. The ESA History Project was first to exploit this research potential, with impressive results (see ESA SP-1235).

The Living Record

Only roughly 7% of all documents produced or acquired by the Agency manage to survive the rigorous filtering process before becoming part of the historical archive, and they are split across the ESA sites. ESA Headquarters houses mainly the official, legal, financial and personnel records.

The European Centre for Space Records (ECSR), established at ESRIN in 2002, will ensure the preservation of the valuable records of completed ESA projects and their management archives. This facility also has sufficient capacity to house the project-related records built up by Industry. All technical records currently housed at ESTEC are being sorted and two-thirds have already been transferred (e.g. Envisat) in 2002 to the new ESRIN facility. A similar programme will be undertaken at ESOC in 2003.

