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Used and abused. That is how the common police case number often feels. Pulled too often, used when it shouldn't be.

The case number serves a key purpose in two areas of law enforcement: records management and crime reporting.

Records Management

Just about every agency has boxes of old paper records hanging around somewhere. Some still print out copies unnecessarily, making the dreaded purge project bigger and bigger over time. And thanks to the almighty case number getting used as the singular identifier for the content of those boxes, figuring out if they can be destroyed is a massive undertaking. There is a much better way.

For paper records, the police case number is only one of several identifiers that should be used for filing and boxing. Configuring the management of records, box- and location-wise, in a manner that allows you to determine their eligibility for purging by merely reading the label is the way to go. This is accomplished by indexing records and boxes according to whether they are permanent, long-term, active or inactive, and whether they have met their final disposition and required retention period. Having just a year and range of case numbers on the box requires opening it and going through every file in it- a very tedious process.

Crime Reporting

The case number is the singular identifier for a police investigation and all actions taken related to the investigation. In other words, when supplementary information is appended to the case, the same case number is used. When an arrest is made in a case, the arrest should also be the same case number. Why pull a new one? Doing so would be an incorrect approach and leaves room for error in the agency's crime data/clearance rates.

When an a warrant is issued by your agency, the warrant relates to a case which has already been written. The suspect has been identified and now is wanted. If your agency catches the suspect, the arrest is part of....the same case.

Help the police case number feel better...only use it when appropriate. See how in our training. Register at policerecordsmanagement.com/training.