

Storage and Filing

- 1** Lateral filing cabinets hold roughly 40% more per unit of floor space than vertical cabinets. A 36" lateral file cabinet holds approximately 800 letter-size folders (400 per drawer in a 2-drawer unit). A standard 15" vertical 4-drawer cabinet holds about 1,000 folders but occupies a taller, narrower footprint. Laterals win for density per sq ft of floor space.
- 2** Anti-tip interlocks are a safety requirement — not an optional feature. A fully loaded lateral file drawer weighs 60–80 lbs. Opening multiple drawers simultaneously shifts the cabinet's center of gravity forward and can cause the cabinet to tip. Specify anti-tip interlocks that physically prevent more than one drawer from opening at a time.
- 3** Always allow 36"–42" of clear floor space in front of file drawers. A fully extended lateral drawer protrudes 18"–20" from the cabinet face. The user needs room to stand, reach, and maneuver while the drawer is open. In space planning, always account for the open-drawer footprint — not just the closed cabinet depth.
- 4** Steel gauge determines durability — 18-gauge or lower is commercial grade. File cabinets are rated by steel gauge. 18-gauge steel (lower number = thicker) is the commercial standard. 22-gauge is residential grade and will dent, warp, and lose structural integrity under daily use. Always verify gauge on commercial purchases.
- 5** Full-extension drawer slides are worth the premium for daily-use cabinets. Full-extension slides allow the drawer to open completely, giving full access to files at the back. 3/4-extension slides leave the rear 25% of the drawer inaccessible. For any cabinet used daily, the time savings and reduced frustration of full-extension slides justify the cost difference.
- 6** Locking file cabinets protect more than confidential files — they satisfy compliance requirements. HIPAA, SOX, and various state privacy laws require that certain categories of records be stored in locked, controlled-access storage. A locking lateral or vertical file cabinet is often the simplest compliant solution. Verify your industry's requirements before specifying unlocked storage.
- 7** Overhead storage units recover vertical space lost to desk surfaces. In workstations with low ceilings (8'–9'), overhead cabinets above desk surfaces can add 4–8 linear feet of storage per workstation without using any additional floor space. Specify units with adjustable shelving to accommodate binders, boxes, and varying storage heights.
- 8** Color-coding filing systems dramatically reduces retrieval time. Color-coded folder systems (by department, year, category, or alphabetically) reduce misfiling by up to 50% according to records management research. When specifying a filing system, recommend color-coded folders as part of the initial setup — retrofitting later is time-consuming.
- 9** Mobile pedestals provide personal storage that travels with the employee. In hot-desking or open-plan environments, a personal mobile pedestal (on casters, with a lock) gives each employee secure personal storage they can wheel to any workstation. This is the most cost-effective way to provide personal file storage in flexible work environments.
- 10** Plan filing storage for 12–18 months of growth, not just current volume. The most common storage mistake is buying for current need and running out of space within a year. Assess current folder count, estimate annual growth rate, and size the filing system for 18 months of capacity. Adding cabinets later rarely matches the original finish exactly.