

Storage Cabinets

Q1. What steel gauge should I look for in a commercial storage cabinet?

A: For heavy-use applications — supply rooms, copy areas, mailrooms, and anywhere cabinets are accessed multiple times daily — specify 18-gauge steel throughout the cabinet body and door panels. This gauge resists the denting, bowing, and frame distortion that occurs when cabinets are loaded to capacity and used heavily over years. Lighter gauges flex visibly under heavy loading and lose their shape over time, causing doors to misalign and latches to fail. For lighter-use applications — reference binder storage, personal supply storage in private offices — 20-gauge body steel is acceptable. The key is honesty about how heavily the cabinet will actually be used. Light-duty steel in a high-traffic supply room will show wear within two to three years. Heavy-duty steel in a lightly used environment represents unnecessary cost. Don't evaluate gauge by feel alone. Request the product specification sheet and verify the stated gauge. Some manufacturers use heavier gauge on door panels while using lighter gauge on the body, or vice versa. Both matter — door panels that dent easily or body panels that bow under top load are equally problematic.

Q2. What is the difference between hinged, sliding, and tambour door configurations?

A: Hinged doors open outward from the cabinet face and provide full, unobstructed access to the entire cabinet interior when open. They are the most common and most reliable configuration, with simple hinge hardware that rarely fails under normal use. The limitation is swing clearance: each door requires clear space equal to its width for a full 90-degree opening. In tight spaces, the swinging door can obstruct aisles or collide with adjacent furniture. Sliding doors bypass the swing clearance problem by traveling laterally across the cabinet face. One door slides left, the other slides right, and neither extends beyond the cabinet's footprint. The limitation is that only half the interior is accessible at any one time — the door blocks the half it has slid to cover. For cabinets where everything is always accessed from the same general side, this is manageable. For cabinets where items are spread evenly across the full interior, it creates inconvenience. Tambour doors roll up vertically or retract horizontally into a housing built into the cabinet. They eliminate both swing clearance and the half-access limitation of sliding doors. Tambour doors are elegant in appearance and popular in executive and reception environments. Their limitation is the tambour track, which requires periodic cleaning and lubrication and is less tolerant of rough handling than hinge hardware. Specify tambour doors in controlled environments; avoid them in rough-use locations like mailrooms and warehouses.

Q3. How do I determine how many shelves and what shelf spacing I need?

A: Start by inventorying what will be stored. Measure the height of the tallest individual items in each category — a ream of paper, a standard binder, a large three-ring binder, an equipment box. The shelf spacing must exceed the height of the tallest item in that group by at least 1 to 2 inches for comfortable insertion and removal. A shelf spacing that requires tilting an item to get it in and out creates friction and causes shelf edges to wear. Standard commercial binders are approximately 10 to 11 inches tall. Reams of paper in a box are approximately 10 inches tall. Letter-size legal pads stored flat are about 0.5 inches each. Plan shelf spacing accordingly: 12 inches clear between shelves accommodates most binders and paper products with room to spare. Equipment boxes or oversized reference materials may require 15 or 18 inches. Adjustable shelving at 1.25-inch vertical increments gives you flexibility to reconfigure as needs change. However, note that every adjustment point is a potential load path; verify that the shelf clip or pin system is rated for the loads you intend to place on each shelf. Fixed shelving is stronger at any given position but limits flexibility — choose based on how stable your storage needs are likely to be.

Q4. What locking option is best for a shared storage cabinet in an open office?

A: A shared storage cabinet in an open office typically needs to balance convenience for authorized users with adequate deterrence against unauthorized access. A standard cam lock with keyed-alike cylinders across all shared storage units is the most practical solution. Keyed alike means all cabinets in the group open with the same key, so authorized users carry a single key rather than a separate key for each cabinet. For environments where turnover or key loss is a regular concern, specify a core-removable lock system. When an employee leaves or a key is lost, the lock core is removed and replaced with a new core of a different key combination — no locksmith required and no cabinet needs to leave service during the process. The cost of core-removable systems is modestly higher than standard locks, but the operational savings over years of use are substantial. Electronic keypad or RFID locks eliminate the physical key entirely. These are appropriate where multiple people need access without sharing a physical key — each user has a unique PIN or access card and the lock can be programmed to grant or revoke individual access. The audit trail feature is particularly valuable in regulated environments where knowing who accessed specific storage is a compliance requirement.

Q5. Can storage cabinets support weight on top of them?

A: Most commercial steel storage cabinets are structurally capable of supporting weight on top, but the rated top load capacity varies significantly by product and must be verified in the specification sheet. Common applications for the top surface include printers, copiers, plants, monitors, and display items. A standard commercial office laser printer weighs 25 to 50 pounds; a larger departmental copier can weigh 80 to 150 pounds. Before placing equipment on top of a storage cabinet, confirm that the top panel load rating meets or exceeds the equipment weight. A cabinet rated for 50 pounds on top is not appropriate for a 70-pound printer. Exceeding the top load rating can cause the top panel to permanently deflect, which stresses the cabinet frame, misaligns the door openings, and creates an unstable surface for the equipment above. Counter-height cabinets — typically 42 inches — are explicitly designed as work surfaces and carry higher top load ratings than full-height cabinets. If you need a storage unit that will double as a work surface, specify a counter-height model designed for that purpose and verify the work surface rating. Add a finished surface protector — laminate, butcher block, or solid surface — if the cabinet top will be used as a standing work area.

Q6. What finishes are available and which are most durable?

A: Electrostatic powder coat is the standard finish for commercial steel storage cabinets and provides the best durability for the application. The finish is applied as a dry powder, electrostatically charged to adhere to the metal substrate, then baked in an oven to cure. The result is a hard, even surface that resists chipping, chemical cleaning agents, UV fading, and scratching far better than liquid paint finishes. Powder coat is also an environmentally preferable option, as it generates no VOC emissions during application. Laminate finishes over a wood substrate (MDF or particleboard core) are used in executive and conference environments where the storage cabinet must integrate visually with wood-finish furniture. Laminate cabinets provide a warmer, more residential aesthetic and are available in a wider range of wood tones and patterns than powder coat. The trade-off is reduced durability — laminate can chip at corners and edges, and MDF is moisture-sensitive in ways that steel is not. Textured finishes hide minor surface scratches better than smooth finishes and are a practical choice for any high-traffic utility storage environment. Fine-texture powder coat, sometimes called pebble or sand texture, is common on commercial storage cabinets and maintains its appearance better over years of use than smooth gloss finishes, which show every contact mark and fingerprint.

Q7. How should I anchor storage cabinets to prevent tipping?

A: Full-height storage cabinets — 60 inches and above — should be anchored to a structural wall substrate, not just drywall. Locate the wall studs behind the drywall surface using a stud finder and use lag screws of appropriate length and diameter to pass through the drywall and engage the stud. Most cabinet manufacturers provide an anti-tip kit or built-in anchor tab at the top rear of the cabinet for this purpose. In masonry or concrete walls, use anchor bolts of the correct type for the substrate. Expansion anchors are appropriate for concrete; wedge anchors or sleeve anchors provide the highest pull-out resistance. In either case, the anchor should be able to resist a minimum horizontal force equal to the loaded weight of the cabinet. When in doubt, consult a structural engineer or the manufacturer's installation documentation. In open-plan environments where running anchors to walls is impractical, adjacent cabinets can be ganged together with the manufacturer's gang hardware and the assembled unit anchored at the end cabinet nearest a wall or partition. This approach requires that the partition itself be capable of resisting the anti-tip load — lightweight demountable partitions may not be adequate, and this should be verified before relying on them for anti-tip anchoring.



Q8. Are there storage cabinets designed for specific office environments like reception or executive offices?

A: Yes, and the distinction matters both functionally and aesthetically. Executive and reception storage cabinets are manufactured as case goods — furniture-grade pieces with wood veneer or high-pressure laminate surfaces, solid wood edge banding, and finished backs that look presentable when not against a wall. These cabinets integrate with executive desk collections, credenzas, and conference furniture and are not intended to stand in utility areas. Reception-area cabinets and credenzas often double as transaction surfaces, incorporating a raised panel on the back side to screen the work surface from visitor view while providing a surface at the appropriate height for standing visitor interaction. These pieces require a finished appearance on all four sides and are generally specified as part of a coordinated reception furniture package. Executive office storage cabinets are frequently specified with lateral file capability below a bookcase section above, all in a coordinated finish that matches the executive desk and credenza. These combination units provide filing, supply storage, and display in a single piece of furniture with a coherent appearance. Specify them as part of a complete furniture package with verified finish matching rather than sourcing the storage cabinet from a different manufacturer than the desk system.

Q9. What maintenance does a commercial storage cabinet require?

A: Commercial steel storage cabinets require minimal maintenance to achieve their rated service life. Hinge hardware should be inspected annually for signs of corrosion or loosening — loose hinge screws allow doors to sag and misalign, which stresses the latch mechanism and eventually prevents proper closure. Tighten loose screws immediately; if the screw hole has stripped, use a slightly larger screw or relocate the hinge to an adjacent hole position. Adjustable shelf support systems should be inspected when shelf positions are changed. Bent or damaged shelf clips allow shelves to shift under load, which can cause contents to spill and the shelf panel itself to fall. Replace damaged clips rather than leaving them in service. Keep a small inventory of spare shelf clips on hand, as they are easily lost and being unable to adjust a shelf because of missing hardware is a common and easily avoided operational inconvenience. Clean cabinet exteriors periodically with a mild, pH-neutral cleaning solution. Avoid abrasive cleaners that scratch the powder-coat finish and expose bare metal to corrosion. Clean cabinet interiors annually and inspect for signs of moisture intrusion, rust, or mold. Cabinets positioned against exterior walls in buildings with poor insulation can develop condensation on interior surfaces that over time leads to rust and contamination of stored contents.



Q10. What should I look for when evaluating a storage cabinet's environmental credentials?

A: Several credentialing systems are relevant to commercial storage furniture. BIFMA e3 is the most widely recognized environmental standard for commercial furniture, covering energy use in manufacturing, material content, end-of-life recyclability, and chemical emissions. A product certified to BIFMA e3 at any level has been third-party verified against this standard and provides a documented environmental baseline. Recycled content is a commonly cited metric. Commercial steel cabinets typically contain 25 to 35 percent post-consumer recycled steel content, as recycled scrap steel is the standard raw material input for domestic steel production. Look for an Environmental Product Declaration (EPD) that documents the actual recycled content percentage rather than relying on general claims. EPDs follow ISO 14025 and are verified by independent third parties. Chemical emissions standards matter for indoor air quality. Look for products compliant with GREENGUARD Gold certification or equivalent, which limits the off-gassing of volatile organic compounds into occupied spaces. This is more relevant to laminate and wood-substrate cabinets than to powder-coated steel cabinets, but even powder-coated products can off-gas in the period immediately after manufacturing. Request off-gassing data if the cabinets will be installed in environments with sensitive occupants such as medical or childcare facilities. Download PDF Buyer's Guide PDF Shop Storage Cabinets Talk to an Expert 1.800.460.0858 Monday – Friday, 7am to 6pm CT

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