

## Vertical File Cabinets

### Top 10 Buyer Questions & Expert Answers

#### **Q1. What is a vertical file cabinet and how does it differ from a lateral file cabinet?**

A vertical file cabinet files documents front-to-back within each drawer — folders run from the front of the drawer toward the back, with tabs facing the user when the drawer is open. Vertical cabinets come in letter-width (15") and legal-width (18") sizes, and cannot mix letter and legal files in the same drawer. Lateral file cabinets file side-to-side and are wider (30"–42") but shallower — they accommodate both letter and legal files in the same drawer. Vertical cabinets are the right choice when wall space is limited (they occupy only 15"–18" of wall width) or when all documents are the same size. Laterals are better when filing capacity per linear foot of wall is the priority.

#### **Q2. What size vertical file cabinet do I need — letter or legal?**

Letter-width (15") verticals accommodate standard US letter-size documents (8.5"×11"). Legal-width (18") verticals accommodate legal-size documents (8.5"×14"). You cannot file legal documents in a letter-width cabinet — they will protrude from the drawer or buckle under the drawer front. If your environment uses both letter and legal documents, you have two options: purchase separate letter and legal verticals, or switch to a lateral file cabinet that handles both sizes in the same drawer. Environments that are predominantly letter with occasional legal files often find it more practical to use a lateral rather than maintaining two types of vertical cabinets.

#### **Q3. What is full-extension vs. partial-extension in vertical file cabinet drawers?**

Full-extension drawers open 100% of the drawer depth — every file in the drawer is visible and reachable from the front. Partial-extension drawers (typically 3/4 or less) leave 25–50% of the drawer depth inaccessible without leaning into the cabinet. This is not a minor inconvenience — files filed in the back third of a partial-extension drawer become effectively unusable over time, and people tend to overload the front portion of the drawer, causing suspension stress and drawer binding. Full-extension, ball-bearing drawers are the commercial standard and must be specified. Partial extension is common in budget-grade and residential products — always ask specifically about extension distance before ordering.

#### **Q4. How many file folders does a 4-drawer vertical file cabinet hold?**

A 4-drawer letter-width vertical file cabinet typically holds 120–160 hanging file folders in standard commercial use, assuming moderate packing density and standard-thickness folders. Each drawer holds approximately 30–40 hanging folders. This is equivalent to roughly 8–12 standard file storage boxes. A 4-drawer legal-width vertical holds the same number of legal-size folders. These are estimates — actual capacity depends on folder thickness, document density, and how tightly the files are packed. Plan file capacity with room to grow: a drawer at 80% full capacity allows for efficient filing; a drawer at 100% capacity makes filing difficult and stresses the suspension.

#### **Q5. Why does a vertical file cabinet need an anti-tip mechanism?**

A fully loaded vertical file drawer contains 60–100 lbs of documents. When this weight is extended 25"–27" forward of the cabinet's base, the center of gravity shifts substantially. If a second drawer is also open — or if someone leans on an open drawer — the cabinet can tip forward. The anti-tip interlock prevents more than one drawer from opening at a time, eliminating the cumulative forward weight that causes tip-overs. ANSI/BIFMA standards require vertical file cabinets to pass tip stability tests. Verify compliance before purchasing. For 4-drawer and 5-drawer verticals, wall anchoring is additionally recommended regardless of interlock mechanism.

## Vertical File Cabinets (continued)

### **Q6. When should I specify a fire-rated vertical file cabinet?**

Specify fire-rated vertical file cabinets for environments where document loss from fire would cause significant legal, regulatory, or operational consequences. Key applications include: legal firms with original contracts and executed documents, medical offices with original patient records, accounting firms with tax records and audit documentation, and any environment required by regulation to maintain original documents (HIPAA, SOX, etc.). UL Class 350 1-Hour is the minimum rating for paper document protection. UL Class 125 2-Hour is required for digital media (hard drives, USB drives, flash cards). Note that fire-rated cabinets are significantly heavier (300–500 lbs for a 4-drawer) and should be placed on reinforced floors.

### **Q7. What is a core removable lock and do I need one for my vertical file cabinet?**

A core removable lock uses a cylinder that can be extracted and replaced without a locksmith — the facility manager removes the cylinder with a control key, installs a new cylinder, and hands out new keys in minutes. This is essential for commercial environments with employee turnover: when a staff member leaves and returns keys, or when keys are lost, the lock is replaced immediately at minimal cost. Standard keyed locks require a locksmith to re-key, creating a delay and additional cost. Specify core removable locks for any commercial vertical file cabinet used by multiple people or in an environment with any staff turnover. It is the single most cost-effective lock specification for commercial use.

### **Q8. How do I select between a 2-drawer, 4-drawer, or 5-drawer vertical file cabinet?**

Select drawer count based on filing volume and placement. A 2-drawer vertical (28"–30" tall) is used for personal workstation filing — it matches desk height, fits under desk returns, and provides a usable top surface. It is not sufficient for a primary filing solution for a full-time worker. A 4-drawer vertical (52"–54" tall) is the primary commercial choice — sufficient capacity for most individual users' full filing needs, accessible without a step stool, and manageable in standard office layouts. A 5-drawer vertical (60"–65" tall) maximizes capacity in a minimal floor footprint — ideal for file rooms and shared filing areas where floor space is tight. 5-drawer units require wall anchoring.

### **Q9. What is the difference between home-grade and commercial-grade vertical file cabinets?**

Home-grade verticals (typically \$100–\$250 for a 4-drawer) use thinner 22–24 gauge steel, basic roller drawer suspension instead of ball bearings, no mechanical anti-tip interlock, and basic pin tumbler locks without core removability. They handle light personal use adequately. Commercial-grade verticals (\$400–\$800 for a 4-drawer) use 18–20 gauge steel, full-extension ball-bearing drawer suspension rated for 60–100 lbs per drawer, ANSI/BIFMA-compliant mechanical interlock anti-tip, and core removable locks. The durability difference under daily commercial use is dramatic — commercial-grade cabinets survive 20+ years; home-grade cabinets typically fail structurally within 3–5 years of daily commercial use.

### **Q10. What budget should I plan for commercial vertical file cabinets?**

Commercial vertical file cabinets are more affordable than lateral cabinets due to simpler construction. For a 4-drawer letter-width commercial-grade vertical, budget \$400–\$650 for mid-tier commercial quality — full-extension ball-bearing drawers, mechanical interlock anti-tip, core removable lock, and 20-gauge steel frame. Entry commercial units at \$250–\$400 provide commercial basics but may lack core removable locks. Heavy commercial and fire-rated verticals run \$650–\$2,500 depending on specifications. Project pricing for orders of 3+ units typically reduces per-unit costs by 15–30%. Legal-width (18") verticals run approximately 10–15% more than letter-width equivalents at the same quality tier.