

## Vertical File Cabinets

### Top 5 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.