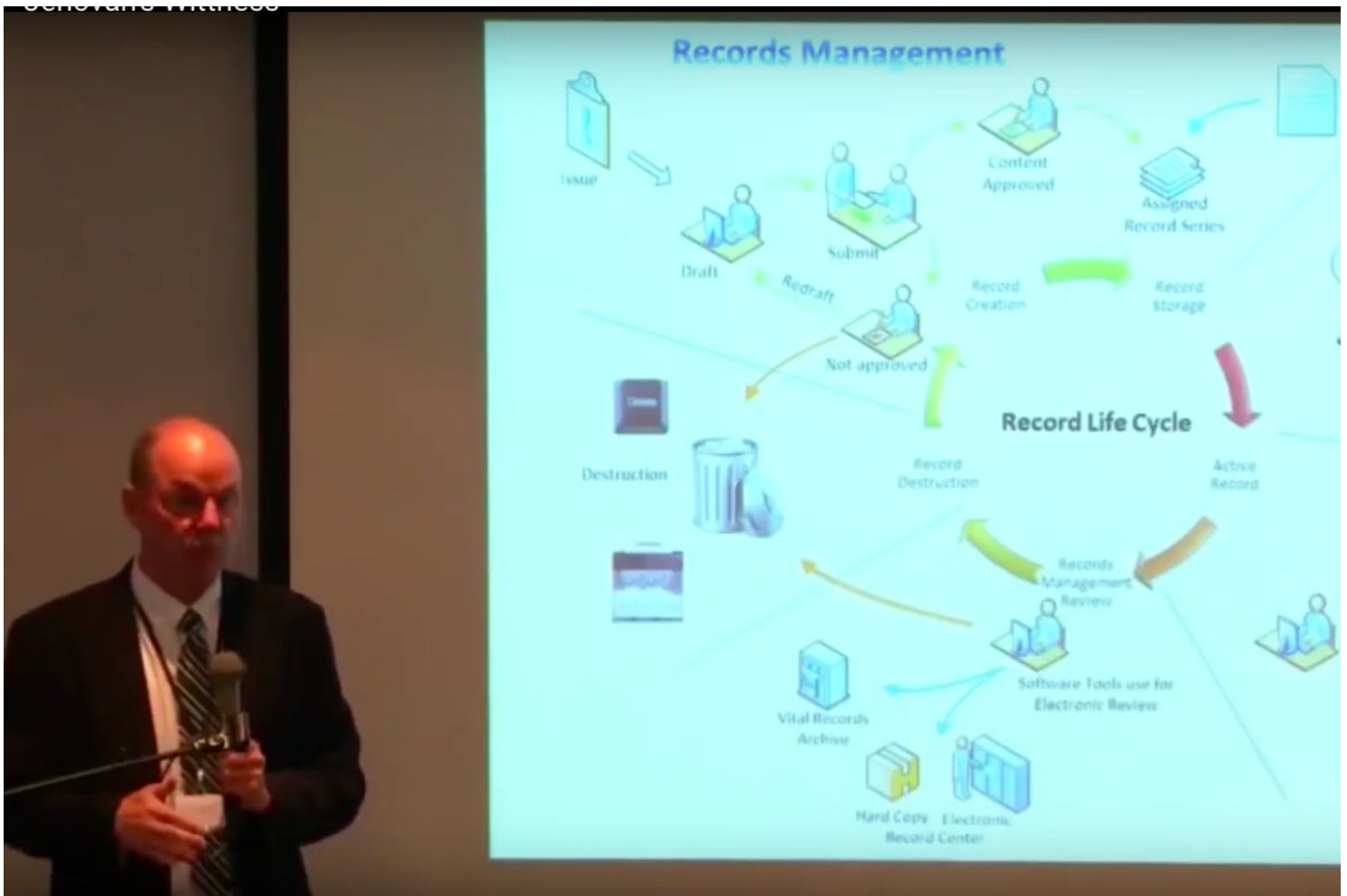


News (<http://www.philly.com/news>)

Watch: Jehovah's Witnesses official says to destroy records because 'Satan's coming after us'

Updated: JULY 9, 2018 — 10:47 AM EDT



SCREENSHOT FROM VIDEO

Shawn Bartlett, the records management overseer for the Jehovah's Witnesses, explains the organization's new record-keeping policies during a 2017 seminar in Britain.

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A Jehovah's Witnesses official delivered an urgent message to a group of elders at a 2017 seminar in Britain: The time had come to rethink the record-keeping policies of the organization, which has come under fire for its handling of child sex abuse complaints.

Shawn Bartlett, the Witnesses' record management overseer, explained that handwritten notes and drafts of internal documents needed to be destroyed because of the potential legal harm they posed to the organization, which has eight million followers worldwide and more than a dozen congregations in the Philadelphia area.

"The question is: Why has this come up?" Bartlett said, according to a video recording of the seminar that was leaked online earlier this year by an anonymous insider.

"Well, we know that the scene of this world is changing, and we know Satan's coming after us, and he's going to go for us legally. We can see by the way things are shaping up. So the organization has said, 'We've run into difficulties in the past because of the records we have.'"

A judge in California fined the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society of New York, the Witnesses' corporate nonprofit, more than \$2 million (<https://www.revealnews.org/blog/jehovahs-witnesses-tab-for-child-sex-abuse-secrecy-2m-and-counting/>) last year for refusing to turn over a secretly compiled list of 775 suspected child molesters (<http://www.philly.com/philly/news/jehovahs-witnesses-children-sexual-abuse-arrest-20180524.html>) within the organization.

The Watchtower also has settled multiple lawsuits (<https://www.sandiegoreader.com/news/2018/jan/12/ticker-jehovahs-witnesses-settle-sex-abuse-case/>) filed by former members across the country, many of whom claimed that they were sexually abused (https://www.pennlive.com/news/2017/02/jehovahs_witness_sexual_abuse.html) as children — and that their abusers were protected by elders who enforced the millenarian religion's rules, like one that requires sexual assault victims to find two eyewitnesses to support their allegations.

>>***READ MORE: Jehovah's Witnesses: A Silent History of Sex Abuse***
(<http://www.philly.com/philly/news/jehovahs-witnesses-sexual-abuse-children-beliefs-rules.html>)

Publicly, Watchtower leaders insist that they abhor child abuse, and don't provide cover for predators. In the video, Bartlett never mentions the sex abuse lawsuits directly, but he explains the need for elders to be mindful of handwritten records and other files that could prove to be a liability.

At one point during the seminar, Bartlett told the attendees that they should destroy drafts of any documents in their possession. "And the reason is, is because there's many comments that are sometimes made on drafts," he said. "Those are the ones that get us in trouble."

>>***READ MORE: She was 5 when another Jehovah's Witness Raped Her***
(<http://www.philly.com/philly/news/jehovahs-witnesses-child-sex-abuse-stephen-lett-chessa-manion-20180620.html>)

The Witnesses declined to make Bartlett available for an interview, or to discuss his comments from the video.

The footage is no longer available on YouTube. A message on the website notes that the material was removed at the request of Watchtower.

MORE COVERAGE

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