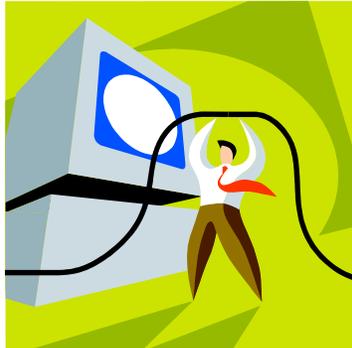


ACETATE MICROFILM - RISKS TO YOUR INFORMATION



Over the past year, the New York State Archives has been working with local governments to assess the problem of acetate film and the danger it poses to the information contained on the film. The problem is a serious one and one that should not be taken lightly. For those of you that have microfilm, your film should be inspected to see if it is acetate based. If it is, you should read the information sheet produced by the New York State Archives and take steps immediately to separate that film from your non-acetate based film and then re-format the information to another medium. The other medium could be film, paper or electronics (See our website for guidelines on each).

We greatly appreciate the work of the New York State Archives to identify this problem and to highlight the conditions for improvement. Below is an information sheet on the problem and what you might possibly do to handle it.

ACETATE MICROFILM INFORMATION SHEET

New York State Archives

MICROFILM

Microfilm is comprised of two major components, a base layer and an emulsion layer. The image resides on the emulsion layer, while the base layer gives the film its rigidity.

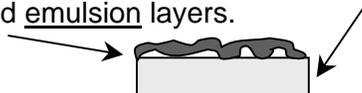


HISTORY

Film producers manufactured microfilm with an acetate base layer from 1923 to the mid-1970s. Although production stopped at this time, acetate film was sold and used in producing micrographic copies of documents into the 1980s. There is one report that one company supplied acetate film into the 1990s.

PROBLEM

Acetate-based microfilm deteriorates when not stored at the correct temperature and humidity levels. Deterioration causes the acetate base layer to shrink, resulting in distortion and separation between the base and emulsion layers.



The most significant damage concerning acetate microfilm is not the distortion of the film, but the *loss of information on the film.*

IDENTIFICATION

Acetate microfilm can be identified in several ways.

- *Sight:* Hold a wound roll of film up to light and examine its edge. If it is opaque the film is likely acetate based film. If it is translucent it is probably safe, polyester-based film.
- *Curl:* Acetate film tends to curl.
- *Tear:* Attempt to tear a small portion of the leader (portion without images at start of roll). Acetate film will tear.
- *Test Strip:* Acid Deterioration (A-D) test strips will scientifically determine whether or not film is on an acetate base.

DETERIORATION

Acetate microfilm that has already started to deteriorate will usually produce a vinegar scent as well as exhibit the characteristics listed above.

WHY MAY THIS BE A PROBLEM FOR YOU?

The loss of information is the most significant impact deteriorated microfilm can have on your organization. This is particularly important in cases where original documents were discarded after filming and the master film negative can't be located.

SOLUTIONS

- *Immediate:* ❶ Separate acetate microfilm from non-acetate film. The chemicals given off when acetate film deteriorates will damage surrounding materials. ❷ Store separated acetate film under proper temperature and humidity specifications
- *Long Term:* Reformat information to a polyester-based microfilm or other suitable preservation media.

MORE INFORMATION

For additional information see New York State Archives Technical Information Series No. 15, *Acetate Microfilm*. You may also contact your local New York State Archives Regional Advisory Officer (RAO) or Tyler Selle at the State Archives in Albany, 518-473-9984 or tselle@mail.nysed.gov.