

Microfilm

Dear Reader:

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We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with municipal government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other MTAS website material.

Sincerely,

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Microfilm

Reference Number: MTAS-520

MICROFILM ^[1]

Microfilming can offer as much as a 98 percent reduction in storage space over storing records in their original paper format. ^[2] And by having a back-up copy of microfilm stored off site, a government can almost immediately recover from any disaster or occurrence that damages its vital records. Produced correctly, microfilm is considered to be archival quality, meaning it is a suitable format for storing permanent retention documents.

But microfilm has disadvantages. No alternative format is going to be a perfect solution for all your records management problems. Microfilming is not cheap. It is a labor-intensive process that requires expertise of the person doing the work. Additionally, if microfilm is not properly produced, developed and stored, it will not stand the test of time.

^[1] In this text, the terms “microfilm” and “microfilming” are used generally to discuss the various micro-photographic processes available.

^[2] Using Microfilming, p.1.

State Microfilming Program

Reference Number: MTAS-521

The law provides that the State Library and Archives is charged with providing trained staff and appropriate equipment necessary to produce and store microfilm reproductions of official, permanent value bound volume records created by county and municipal governments.

To implement this security microfilming program, the state librarian and archivist are authorized to develop a priority listing of essential records based on retention schedules developed by the UT County Technical Assistance Service and the UT Municipal Technical Advisory Service. This priority listing of essential records may be revised from time to time to accommodate critical needs in individual counties or municipalities or to reflect changes in retention schedules. The camera negative of the microfilmed records shall be stored in the security vault at the State Library and Archives, and duplicate rolls of these microfilmed records shall be made available to county and municipal governments on a cost basis. ^[1]

^[1] T.C.A. § 10-7-511.

Technical Guidelines

Reference Number: MTAS-523

The following guidelines for producing and storing microfilm are considered crucial by the Tennessee State Library and Archives: ^[1]

- **Microfilm must conform to national archival processing and storage standards if it is to survive:** Tennessee law requires that “photographic film shall comply with the minimum standards of quality approved for permanent photographic records by the National Bureau of Standards (now the National Institute of Standards and Technology), and the device used to reproduce such records on film shall be one which accurately reproduces the original thereof in all details. ^[2]
- **Good preparation of records to be filmed is crucial:** If needed, records should be cleaned and flattened before filming. You must film the records in their correct order and arrangement. At the beginning of each group, series and sub-series, identify the records by filming descriptive “targets” that also include notes on physical condition and arrangement of the records.

- **All records in a group or series, regardless of condition, must be filmed in proper orientation, order and focus:** If a page is omitted or improperly filmed and the original destroyed after filming, there is no way to recover the permanent record that should have been preserved.
- **Archival quality silver-gelatin film must be used for the camera-image negative film, and it must be processed according to archival standards:** Diazo film and other inexpensive process films will not endure. Residual chemicals on film from poor processing will destroy film. However, reference copies may be on any sort of commercial film that is convenient and affordable. It will have to be replaced from time to time, since heavy use in readers will wear out the film.
- **The original negative (camera-image) film must be reserved in archival storage conditions and should be kept at a site removed from the main archives:** Only positive copies of the original negative should be used for reference, otherwise the original may deteriorate. High humidity and changes in temperature that are wide or frequent tend to hasten the destruction of film. The original negative (camera image) film must be used only to produce reference copies as needed. Indeed, it is still better to have a second negative copy from which to produce reference-use positives, so that the camera- image negative original is itself preserved. Off-site storage under archival conditions offers the best chance for survival of the original negative film. The Tennessee State Library and Archives is a good storage option for counties and municipalities that wish to preserve their original camera-image, negative film.

For more information on microfilming, contact the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators, and request a copy of its publication entitled *Using Microfilm* by Julian L. Mims, CRM, issued in February 1992.

For general information about the Archives Development Program, including how to schedule a visit to your community, please contact adp.tsla@tn.gov [1]. Tennessee Archives Management Advisories (TAMAs) can be viewed at: <https://sos.tn.gov/products/tsla/tennessee-archives-management-advisories-tamas> [2].

[1] Tennessee Archives Management Advisory 99-005, Microfilming Permanent Records, 11 January 1999.

[2] T.C.A. § 10-7-501.

Links:

[1] <mailto:adp.tsla@tn.gov>

[2] <https://sos.tn.gov/products/tsla/tennessee-archives-management-advisories-tamas>

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