

# Microfilming Public Records

## Getting Started with Permanent “Digital” Preservation



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## Overview of Microfilming Records

The State Archives and Public Records Administration oversees records management functions for all state and municipal agencies. This includes records management advice, assistance, and consultation. Records management is a comprehensive task encompassing all records, regardless of format or media.

Permanent preservation ensures that records remain readable and accessible forever. Permanent preservation is a complex responsibility encompassing all records, regardless of format or media.

This guide serves as a resource providing practical recommendations for the preservation of permanent records in non-paper format.

## Things to Know

### What is Microfilm?

Microfilm is a durable film that stores/displays images of documents. Microfilming is a means of capturing images on durable transparent film that may be viewed on microfilm readers.

Microfilming is a highly specialized process and the State Archives and Public Records Administration is mandated by state law to provide advice and assistance to state and local government agencies on the management of public records (R.I. Gen. Laws §§ [38-1-11](#) and [42-8.1-5](#)), including, specifically, the microfilming of public records.

### Why Microfilm?

The National Archives and Records Administration ([Why does NARA continue to microfilm records?](#)) continues to recommend microfilm for records with long-term or permanent retention. Microfilm is a low-cost, reliable, standardized image storage medium that requires only a cool, dry environment for long-term preservation. The equipment needed to view microfilm images is simple, consisting of light and magnification. Microfilm has a life-expectancy of hundreds of years.

Digital images consist of a wide variety of machine codes that require computer hardware and software to be made visible. To avoid the obsolescence of changing computer technology, digital images must be reformatted periodically.

### What is a records life cycle?

Records go through three primary stages: creation (or receipt), maintenance and use, and disposition (disposal or permanent preservation).



### **What is Records Retention?**

The minimum amount of time a record should legally be maintained or "retained," regardless of its format. Documents deemed permanent can only be replaced by microfilm.

### **When do I contact the State Archives?**

When you are considering microfilming permanent records to replace paper.

## Before Starting

### Selecting a vendor

- Ensure that the vendor adheres to imaging standards and recommendations from the [National Archives and Records Administration](#). Ask the following questions:
  - Are they technologically proficient in the work you need?
  - Are they able to follow your specifications (file types, metadata, quality, turnaround, etc.)?
  - Will they deliver on schedule?
- Choose a vendor who:
  - Has references;
  - Will send you samples demonstrating that they can meet your specifications; and
  - Can tell you exactly how your materials will be handled, transported, stored, safeguarded, etc.
- Service Agreements and Contracts should include:
  - Quality control processes;
  - Consequences for failure to deliver that quality; and
  - Safe handling of your papers or film, including types of packaging, mode of shipment, insurance, etc.



See [ANSI/AIIM MS19–1993, Standard Recommended Practice - Identification of Microforms](#) for more criteria on what vendors must have the ability to do.

- Please contact the State Archives and Public Records Administration with any questions prior to selecting a vendor.

## Getting Started

### Identifying eligible records

- Microfilming is not inexpensive, so only records in large volume or with permanent retention, or retention periods beyond 30 years, should typically be considered.
- Additional considerations when selecting records may include frequency of public use and request and concerns for the condition of the paper records.

### Preparing eligible records

- Records should be organized and checked for proper sequence and any misfiling.
- Make sure the filming order is the same as the order that the original records are maintained.
- Remove all pins, clips, and other fasteners with an archivally acceptable tool, such as a microspatula, to prevent tearing of the documents. Additional advice for removing fasteners can be found on the NorthEast Document Conservation Center's [Conservation Procedures](#) page.
- If the files are to be maintained after filming, remove all staples, etc., except those necessary to maintain the identity of the individual files.
- Ensure targets stand out clearly and provide spacing in the film before and after every target. Targets are pages prepared by the organizer to insert between different series of records (or different date spans).



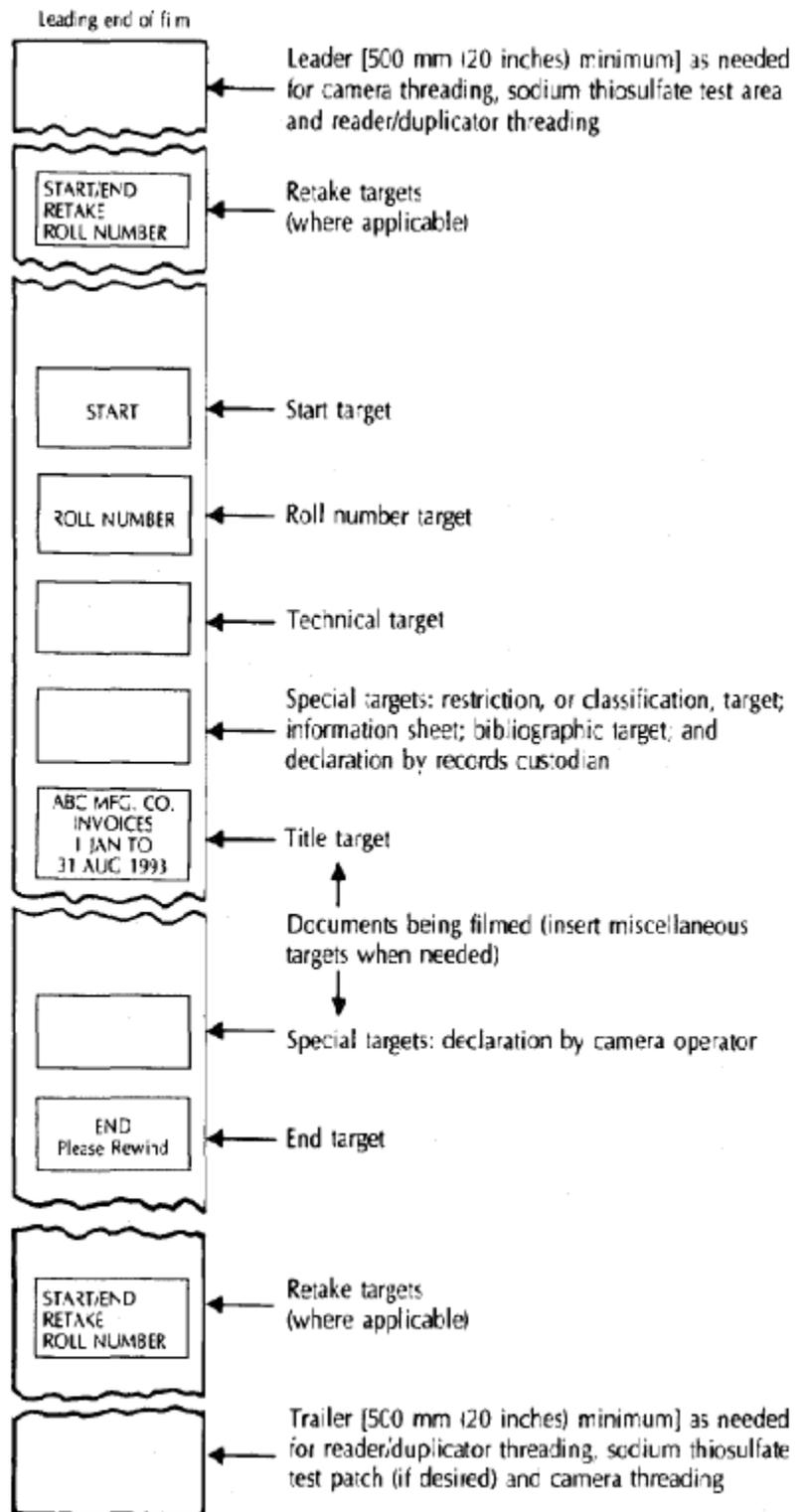
**Targets alert microfilm users that they are beginning a new sequence of records.**

- If documents or files have been misplaced and cannot be located for filming, a target page must be inserted in its place that tells the viewer that the specified file was incomplete and was not accidentally or dishonestly omitted.
- Additional targets should be included to note blank pages, illegible documents, and any other information needed to aid in the identification of filmed material.

## Documenting Film

- Each roll of film should be in the following order:
  - Resolution Chart;
  - Density Target;
  - Start;
  - Roll Number;
  - Certificate of Authenticity;
  - Camera Operator Certificate;
  - Title Target;
  - Records;
  - Camera Operator Certificate;
  - Certificate of Authenticity; and
- End of Roll.

For additional samples, see Standard ANSI/AIIM MS19-1993.



## Going Forward

### What happens when the agency wants to dispose of paper records?

Complete the Certification of Microfilming to Standards form, available on page 8 of this guide. The form should be printed on the agency's letterhead and must be signed by the microfilm operator/vendor and the project lead from the agency. This form verifies that the listed records have been microfilmed in compliance with the microfilming standard, ANSI/AIIM MS19-1993.

Prior to destruction, the agency must also submit a [Certificate of Records Destruction \(CRD\)](#) to the Public Records Administration for all paper records it is prepared to destroy after being microfilmed.

### How do I care for microfilm?

Microfilm should be stored in a dark, temperature-controlled environment and reviewed annually to ensure readability, mitigate risk, and guarantee the data is still readable.



**Readability means the ability to clearly read and distinguish the content of the records stored on microfilm. Readability maintains the integrity of the document.**

Keep your work copy film stored away from the following to ensure maximum life expectancy:

- Ammonia
- Automobile Exhaust
- Cardboard Cartons
- Excessive Temperature and Humidity
- Floor Cleaning Agents
- Hydrogen Sulfides
- Nitrogen Oxides
- Organic Solvents
- Paint fumes
- Peroxides
- Rubber Bands
- Sulphur Dioxides

Continued preservation of records, in any format, is complex. Records must be available in a readable (stable) state for their entire life cycle and must be able to be produced for the public if requested. Recopy microfilm immediately if any loss of information is detected.

(Use Your Agency's Letterhead)

State Archivist and Public Records Administrator  
Rhode Island State Archives and Public Records Administration  
RI Department of State, Office of the Secretary of State  
33 Broad St.  
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Sir/Madam:

I hereby certify that the records listed on the attached Certificate(s) of Records Destruction have been microfilmed in accordance with the microfilm specifications listed in [ANSI/AIIM MS19-1993, Standard Recommended Practice -Identification of Microforms](#) and Records Management ([100-RICR-40-05-1](#)) and are the permanent, legal replacement of the source paper records.

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Supervisor, Microfilm Unit

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Date

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Head of Agency or Designate

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Date