



# Records Management Bulletin

Records management advice prepared for GNWT employees  
by the Records Management Unit of Public Works and Services

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## Microfilming Records

### What is Microfilming?

**Microfilming** refers to the process of photographing records and reproducing them on photographic film. The records that are created by this process are called **microforms**. The most common types of microforms are:

- Roll microfilm, where the film is stored on a continuous roll, in either a reel or a cassette.
- Microfilm jackets, where the film is sliced into sections and put into a 4 by 6 inch polyester sleeve.
- Microfiche, a sheet of film, usually 4 by 6 inches, which can contain hundreds of exposures.
- Aperture Cards, a card that has rectangular openings in which a strip or frame of film is mounted.

Microforms can reduce the amount of space that it takes to store records by as much as 98 percent. Good quality microforms have an estimated life span of at least 100 years.

### Why Would I Consider Microfilming Records?

Microforms are mainly used to store records that are in the semi-active phase of their life cycle. Microforms offer a number of advantages:

- **Substitution.** In some cases it is useful and cost-effective to microfilm records in order to replace paper originals. Substitution is best used for large series of semi-active records that have high retrieval rates. It is also used for records that will be kept for more than 20 years.
- **Security.** Microforms can be used as a back-up copy of vital records and records that will be kept permanently.
- **Planned Duplication.** Portions of a records series may be filmed in order to give two or more agencies access to the same information. This is useful when a program is transferred from one department to another.
- **Publication.** In some cases, microforms are used to distribute records to people or organizations. This can be less expensive than printing paper copies.

### What Types of Records Can Be Microfilmed?

Almost any paper record can be microfilmed. The condition of the records will affect the price of the project and the quality of the microform. Well-organized and uniform records are easier to film.

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A **rotary camera** is used to film records that are of uniform size and contrast. The cameras use a feeder to automatically move records in front of the lens. They can photograph thousands of records an hour. You can only use this type of camera for records that are in stable condition and do not have attachments.

**Stationary** or **planetary cameras** are used for records that cannot be fed into a rotary camera. They are used for large records, such as maps and engineering drawings, records that are bound together, and records that are in a fragile state.

### **How Do I Set Up a Microfilming Program?**

The Government of the Northwest Territories does not provide microfilming services. Service providers may be hired on contract.

Speak to your records coordinator and the Records Management Unit at Public Works and Services before starting a microfilming program. You should consider several issues before starting the program:

- Does the program have senior management support?
- Is this program part of the ordinary business of the department?
- What happens to the originals once they have been filmed?
- Is there a procedures manual in place?
- Does the department have to purchase equipment to store and read the microform? Where should the equipment be located?

### **Are There Any Legal Issues With Using Microforms?**

There are no significant legal issues with microforms as long as they were created in accordance with the Canadian General Standards Board's (CGSB) **Microfilm and Electronic Images as Documentary Evidence** standard (CAN/CGSB-72.11-93).

Federal laws and the **Northwest Territories Evidence Act** state that microfilmed records are admissible in court. The NWT Evidence Act states:

Where a [record] . . . kept or held by a person (a) . . . is photographed in the course of an established practice of the person of photographing objects of the same or a similar class in order to keep a permanent record of them, . . . a print from the photographic film is admissible in evidence in all cases and for all purposes for which the object photographed would have been admissible. (R.S.N.W.T. 1988, c.E-8, s.48(2))

The CGSB standard sets out requirements for microfilming programs. Your department will be able to show that it has produced a microform “in the course of an established practice” if it follows the standard.

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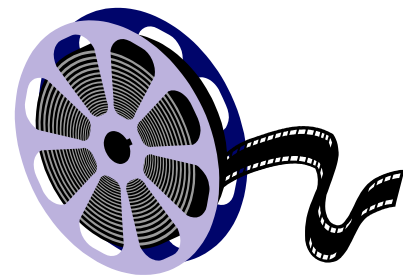
For more information, contact your department's records coordinator, or contact the Records Management Unit at 920-3009 or 873-7446

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Keep in mind that the **Archives Act** also has an impact on microfilming programs. Your department cannot destroy original records that have been microfilmed without the Public Records Committee's authorization.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Most of the GNWT's records do not need to be microfilmed. Most records have very low semi-active retrieval rates and are kept for relatively short periods of time. It is not cost-effective to microfilm these records. Microfilming is useful for records that have long retention periods or high semi-active retrieval rates.



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