

**Survey Checklist:
Assessment of Cold Storage Needs for Film-based Photographic Collections**

Introduction

Film-based photographic collections are composed of many different types of media. These may include black and white negatives (sheet films and cut film strips), color negatives, slides (transparencies), motion picture film (reel film), microfilm, microfiche, x-rays (radiographs), and aerial film (sheet and roll). Cellulose nitrate, cellulose acetate and color materials are particularly susceptible to deterioration which can be significantly slowed by introduction into cold storage. Cold storage encompasses a range of temperatures ranging from approximately 40 degrees Fahrenheit to well below freezing, along with a relative humidity usually between 30-40%. By implementing cold storage, the rate of deterioration in film-based photographic collections can be reduced to such an extent that images that might last only 5-40 years could last for several hundred years.

Survey of Film-based Photographic Collections

Before implementing cold storage, it is important to determine the location and volume of film-based materials in a collection. This can be accomplished by completing a survey of the collection. The survey should also be the initial tool used to evaluate the condition of film-based photographic collections, and it will help determine the scope and quantity of each type of film-based material to be considered for cold storage.

Prior to beginning the survey, you should acquire as much information about your film-based photographic collection as possible. It may be helpful to first review the survey questions before gathering this information. For example, in order to determine your cold storage needs, you will need information pertaining to the size of the collection, different media types, date, use of the collection, and current storage conditions.

Include the following film-based materials in the survey, and include all film bases (cellulose nitrate, cellulose acetate and polyester):

- Black & white negatives (sheet and roll), color negatives, motion picture film (reel film), slides (transparencies), microfilm, microfiche, aerial film (sheet and roll), x-rays (radiographs)

For purposes of assessing your cold storage needs, the following types of photographic materials do NOT need to be included in the survey:

- Glass plate negatives, lantern slides, photographic prints (B&W and color), Polaroids, photograph albums

Information to Include in Your Survey

Identify the types of film-based photographic materials in your collection. These may include the following:

- B&W negatives (sheet films and cut film strips)
- Color negatives
- Motion picture film (reel film)
- Slides (transparencies)
- Microfilm
- Microfiche
- Aerial film (sheets and rolls)
- X-rays (radiographs)

Record the following information for EACH format of EACH type of film-based material you have in your collection.

- Format/size (35mm, 4x5, 5x7, etc.)
- Film support/base, if known (cellulose acetate, cellulose nitrate, polyester)
- Date(s)
NOTE: This is important for film identification and determination of appropriate storage environment.
- Quantity/volume (cubic feet) of images
- Current housing (envelope, box, file folder, etc)
- Condition of the current housing (stable, torn, stained, rusty, etc.)
- Is new housing necessary? (yes/no)
- How would you like to house the images in cold storage? (types of boxes, etc.)
- If applicable, what size and type of enclosures will you need?
- If applicable, what size box/es will you need?
NOTE: Think about future access and what will facilitate that. Also, consider using different sized boxes, binder boxes, paper envelopes, plastic pages, etc. Use the freezer/shelf space efficiently.
- Are the images accessioned? (yes/no/some)
- What additional documentation must be completed before moving the films to cold storage?
NOTE: Consider cataloging and inventorying needs, but at minimum, an inventory must be completed before the materials are moved to cold storage.

Cellulose acetate, cellulose nitrate and color polyester films require cold storage. Refer to the additional resources for information regarding film identification, preparation and documentation of film-based photographic materials.