

**STORING YOUR PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION:
A GUIDE TO CHOOSING THE PROPER MATERIALS
FOR LONG-TERM STORAGE**


INTRODUCTION





This technical bulletin offers guidelines for the long-term preservation of photographic collections. One of the first steps to achieving this goal is to rehouse collection materials in enclosures and containers that meet the proper criteria. Housing photographs using appropriate, high quality materials limits exposure to acids, atmospheric pollutants, and physical stresses that can damage photographs over time. When purchasing supplies, the most important factor is to choose materials that have passed the Photographic Activity Test (PAT), which ensures that they do not react with the photographic image.

EXAMPLES OF APPROPRIATE MATERIALS

ENCLOSURES





If housing supplies are constructed of paper or paperboard, make sure they are acid- and lignin-free, contain no recycled material, and that the colorants are non-bleeding. In most cases they can be buffered or non-buffered; cyanotypes and blue prints are the only commonly encountered alkaline sensitive photographs that need to be stored in non-buffered materials. In the case of plastic materials, the following types are generally safe to use: polyethylene, polypropylene, and polyester. Due to the possibility of undisclosed additives and other variables, never assume that a plastic material is safe because of the polymer type alone. Always make sure that the materials you are purchasing have passed the PAT.

<p>ENCLOSURES</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Paper envelope</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Parallel seam only, no thumb cut preferred</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">For film and prints</p>	
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ENCLOSURES	<u>Paper 4-flap enclosure</u>	For film, glass plate negatives, and other photos on glass	
	<u>Folder with interleaving</u>	For prints, especially over-size or panoramic	
	<u>Plastic sleeves</u> Locking sleeves and "L" sleeves,	For prints, use backing boards to provide large prints additional support	
	<u>Plastic pocket page</u>	For small prints or new film	




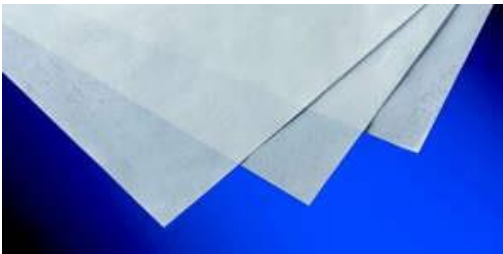
CONTAINERS

Storage boxes should also be constructed of good quality materials that have passed the PAT. Boxes for photographic materials come in standard sizes according to the format of the photograph. As a general rule, vertical boxes provide easier access to materials than horizontal boxes. Make sure to pad out any extra space in a box with good quality rigid support materials, like corrugated board or mat board. Placing rigid materials every few inches within the box will also provide a solid support to your floppy photographic prints, minimizing their ability to curl.




CONTAINERS	<u>Detachable lid negative box with dividers</u>	Vertical storage for all glass plate negatives and positives	
	<u>Telescoping box</u>	Vertical storage for all negatives, smaller prints, mounted prints, slides	
	<u>Drop-front box</u>	Horizontal storage for all prints and for negatives that cannot be stored vertically	
	<u>Museum case or Solander box</u> *boxes made prior to the late 2000's did not pass the PAT test	Horizontal storage for matted prints	

SUPPORTS AND ALBUMS

Support boards and interleaving tissues should be made of good quality materials and pass the PAT. To avoid abrasion place a sheet of interleaving tissue between each photograph when stacking. In addition to providing rigid support within storage boxes, good quality boards can be used to make custom storage folders for oversized photographic materials, such as panoramas.





PAPERS AND BOARDS	<u>Matboard</u>	For mats, box dividers, custom housings, etc.	
	<u>Corrugated board</u>	For folders, box dividers, custom housings, etc.	
	<u>Folder stock</u>	For folders and support within plastic sleeves	
	<u>Interleaving paper</u> e.g. Microchamber or Phototex	In folders and original albums	

Albums can be an excellent storage option for small photographs as they limit the direct handling of prints and light exposure. Proper materials and mounting methods are, however, essential. "Magnetic" albums, a style of album with adhesive pages popular in the later half of the 20th century, are of notoriously poor quality and may bond the photographs to the page. All album materials should pass the PAT and prints should be secured using photo-corners.

ALBUMS	<u>3-ring binder</u>	For plastic pocket pages or album pages	
	<u>Binder box</u>	For plastic pocket pages or album pages	
	<u>Screw post or sewn album</u>	For prints For paper pages with coversheets or plastic pocket pages Secure objects onto pages with photo-corners	





LABELING








Labeling your photographic materials should be done with care. As a rule of thumb, mark the photograph using a soft graphite pencil with as little pressure as possible on the back side (verso) only, preferably in the margin. Labeling your storage enclosure and container is also recommended.

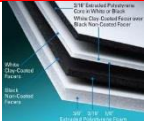




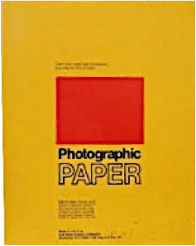

MARKING HOUSINGS	<u>Soft pencil</u> 4B to 6B	For paper and paperboard	
	<u>Pigma Pen</u>	For plastic enclosures only	
MARKING PHOTOGRAPH	<u>Soft pencil</u> 4B to 6B	For paper supports and mounts	
	<u>Solid graphite pencil</u> 4B to 6B	For resin- coated supports	

EXAMPLES OF MATERIALS NOT TO BE USED

There are many reputable supply companies that manufacture and sell the proper storage materials recommended for photographic collections. These companies also sell many other products that are good quality and useful for other types of archival and art materials, but those materials might not be suitable to use on photographs. Remember again that materials for storing photographic collections must pass the PAT.

	<i>Material</i>	<i>Examples</i>	<i>Problems with photographs</i>
<i>LABELING AND ATTACHMENTS</i>	<u>Colored pencil</u>		<p>Use only soft graphite pencils on the back of photographs.</p> <p>Other writing media can fade, rub off, or bleed during a disaster resulting in staining of the photograph and a loss of information.</p>
	<u>Pressure-sensitive labels</u>		<p>The pressure-sensitive adhesive on the label will damage photographs, become harder to remove, and/or fail over time so that the informational content is lost.</p> <p>A foil backing will not address these problems.</p>
	<u>Paperclips or staples</u>		<p>Do not use any paper clips or staples, even rust-proof ones.</p> <p>Over time, they will create permanent dents in the photograph. Clips containing iron will rust in high humidity creating stains and weakened areas.</p>
	<u>Self-adhesive notes</u>		<p>Do not use any brand, even temporarily.</p> <p>Like other pressure-sensitive adhesives, the adhesive will cause staining and deterioration in the photograph as it ages and become difficult to remove.</p>

LABELING AND ATTACHMENTS	<u>Rubber bands</u>		Rubber bands contain sulfur and other compounds that will discolor photographs. The rubber also deteriorates fairly rapidly leading to embrittlement and failure .
ADHESIVES AND MOUNTING	<u>Tapes</u>		Pressure-sensitive tapes will damage photographs, become harder to remove, and/or fail over time.
	<u>Adhesives</u>		Many adhesives will damage photographs, become harder to remove and/or fail over time.
	<u>"Magnetic" albums</u>		Photographs adhere to pages over time by the rubber-based adhesive that creates the sticky page.
CLEANING PRODUCTS	Photo cleaning spray and wipes		May dissolve or otherwise damage photographs including removing surface coatings. Do not attempt to clean photos without the advice and supervision of a conservator.
	Rubber sponges and erasers		Contain sulfur-based materials that will degrade the silver in a photographic image.
BOARDS AND PAPERS	<u>Glassine</u> Interleaving or enclosures		Glassine paper may cause deterioration in photographic images and stick irreversibly to gelatin when exposed to high humidity, even if it passes the PAT.

BOARDS AND PAPERS	<u>Foamcore or foamboard</u>		Poor quality and acidic materials can cause chemical deterioration in photographs including fading, staining, and embrittlement. Weak and poorly constructed housing materials will endanger the physical integrity of the photographs held within them. They should not be used for boxes, dividers, mats, framing, etc.
	<u>Colored mat boards and papers</u>		
	<u>Brown corrugated board</u>		
ENCLOSURES	<u>Cellulose acetate plastic sleeves</u>		Cellulose acetate shrinks, distorts, and off-gasses acetic acid as it deteriorates, which can damage the photographs stored within.
	<u>Vinyl 35mm slide and binder pages</u>		The plasticizers added to polyvinyl chloride, aka vinyl, to impart flexibility are highly prone to migration, which can result in the objects stored within these pages becoming covered in sticky plasticizer.
CONTAINERS	<u>Photographic paper boxes</u>		The boxes that photographic papers are packaged in by the manufacturer are not suitable for long-term print storage and may cause chemical deterioration.
	<u>Box board with acidic core</u>		Poor quality and acidic materials can cause chemical deterioration in photographs.