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BEWARE: LOST DIGITAL IMAGES AND DATA ARE GONE FOREVER

PA State Document Image Services Centre promotes microfilm backup (First published in the August issue of the Micrographics Newsletter)

The Pennsylvania State Document Image Services Centre (DISC) is a firm believer in backing up “vital mission-critical information” on a proven stable media. In its most recent issue of *The Micra*Record*, sent to client state agencies, DISC told them, “Silver microfilm, either microfiche or roll microfilm, has been proven to be the best and most cost effective choice.

DISC noted, “Many Commonwealth agencies have implemented electronic document management and imaging systems over the past 10 years. The systems were seen as management tools to improve efficiency and provide more accurate and timely retrieval of business information. In some instances this happened. In some instances it did not. Common to all implementations were significant growing pains to perfect the process.

“During transition periods, some agencies experienced loss of images and extracted data due to the ‘process’ not being fully understood and documented or (because of) vendor business failures,” DISC said.

Lost and gone forever

“Once lost, electronic versions are gone and not retrievable. Loss of imaged documentation has occurred. In some cases, the paper was still available; in others all information was lost.” DISC noted one client agency chose to back up all their information using COM. When digitized information was lost, the agency was able to recover all lost information because the microfiche was readily available and in very good condition.

DISC advised client agencies, “Electronic backups over time may not be usable due to tape or media degradation, and an agency could be relying on out-dated, unusable media.” In suggesting microfilm backup for agencies’ images or mainframe reports, DISC also noted degradation can be true of non-digital media.

“Poor quality paper originals can self – destruct in a couple of years. Carbon-less print paper can fade over time and be very difficult to read or scan.”

DISC, which is part of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, is one of the largest – if not the largest – in-house COM users among state operations.

It offers bit-mapped COM for permanent records of electronically imaged documents; source document filming, processing and duplication, electronic image scanning and CD-ROM production. But for long term secure storage it advocates microfilm backup.