

## How to Care for Your Originals

*By Jim Lindner*

The following suggestions for the storage and preservation of Videotape are a combination of manufacturer's recommendations, ANSI and SMPTE recommended practices, and experience with old and obsolete tapes, as well as good common sense. The reader is advised to read the full ANSI and SMPTE recommendations for more information.

**Keep Videotape Cool and Dry... and away from curious fingers** a stable cool and dry environment is one of the most important aspects in tape longevity. You are better off keeping the tape in a place which has constant temperature and humidity than in a cooler place with lots of traffic. Tapes left for the curious to handle WILL be destroyed, it is only a matter of time.

**Protect your tapes from physical damage** Cardboard sleeves and inexpensive "library" cases provide little protection for either the cassette or the tape inside. Often these inexpensive cases are made of materials that deteriorate over time. Protect your investment with a high quality shipping case or "shipper". These cases are inexpensive, reusable, and will last many years, and provide additional protection against natural disasters like floods.

**When in doubt, make a copy.** You cannot recover from a lost single master. If you only have one copy of a tape, NEVER allow that copy to circulate. Copies are inexpensive to make and are your only absolute protection against the loss of the program. Often you can recover if you have made copies, even if the quality is lower. Ideally keep copies in different places, and make copies at different times so that they do not all age together.

**Make sure the machine works BEFORE you insert a tape.** One of the biggest causes of damage to tapes is machines in bad condition. If you are uncertain about a machine's condition, insert a tape that is not valuable to ascertain that condition. If a tape is damaged, do not insert it into a videotape recorder, the tape may damage the machine.

**Keep Videotape clean, Keep Videotape away from heat, Keep Videotape away from very strong magnetic fields.** It may seem obvious, but then again do YOU store any of your video tapes at home on top of the TV? Dirt, humidity, and heat are the main enemies of videotape and can make the tapes difficult to play back in short periods of time. You need a very strong magnetic field to damage modern tape, but older tape can be damaged by fields that are weaker. Very long exposure to magnetic fields that are in close physical proximity can cause damage.

**If you can - know what type of machine the tape was recorded on, and when the recording was made.** It may not seem important now, but 20 years from now, it may make matters much simpler. The practical reality is that there are many videotape formats that become obsolete quickly. Knowledge of the machine that recorded the tape originally can be extremely valuable.

**Always label your tapes.** Unless a tape is properly labeled, the only way to know the contents is to play the tape, and if the tape cannot be played back without restoration, how do you know whether the contents are valuable enough to justify restoration cost? Even a simple card system can go a long way in helping to know the contents of a tape, long after the tape has been completed.

**Know when you need professional help.** Many times local expertise is simply not qualified to deal with videotape restoration issues. Damage to a tape that is caused by well meaning people "trying to help" may be permanent. Become the organization expert, and know when to call for help.