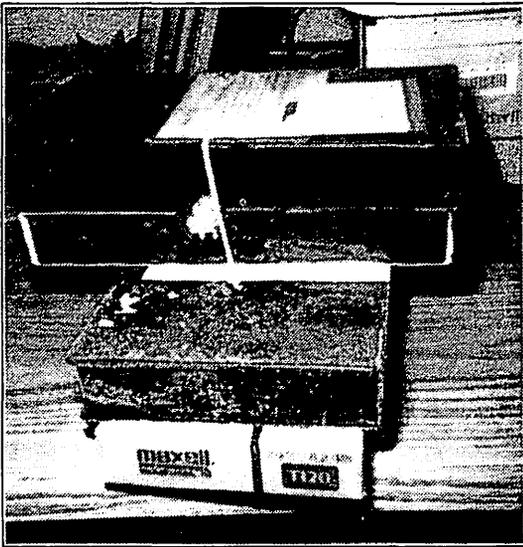


# Tech Talk

One of our members recently sent us some photographs of some videotapes. Take a look at the one below and see if you can tell what is wrong:



If you guessed, as we did, that they are covered with mold, you're wrong. However, although this is not the problem here, it could be, and it is extremely important that all taped materials (audio and video) be stored in conditions that are neither too humid nor too dry (somewhere between 20% and 40%), and that temperatures be relatively cool (less than 70 degrees, but not freezing). More important than the specific humidity or temperature is that both should be maintained constant; fluctuations can cause more damage than too cool/damp or hot/dry. Maintaining the proper environment for your tapes not only will help preserve the quality of tape, but will also avoid mildew which can destroy a tape in short order (to say nothing of the slimy feeling you get when you pick up a

mildewed video case).

What you see in the above photo are tapes and boxes covered with the insulating material that you find in certain cushioned mailers. These mailers were used to return tapes that had been loaned and due to extreme changes in pressure (they were sent airmail), the inner seals of the mailers exploded, not only covering the outer cases, but forcing fibers and particles of insulation into the tapes themselves.

In order to avoid this problem, tapes should be sent in specially designed cases (sometimes called hanger cases), inside Tyvek-type mailers (the un-rippable kind Federal Express and others use). The cases provide the protection to the tape since they lock and can't open when struck on a corner, and the mailer prevents the case from getting lost from the mailer and the attached address! If you do use library cases, as in the photo, be sure they are sealed well with tape, and if you also want to insulate, use the plastic-bubble material rather than fibrous insulated envelopes.

What about dirty videotapes? The problem shown above may be severe enough to warrant special cleaning of the videotape by a professional videotape duplication house. But you may not be aware that normal use of videotapes eventually leaves them covered with invisible, but nevertheless damaging dirt. How do you maintain the cleanliness of any of your videotapes?

If you have several tapes in your collection, you also probably know that rarely are they returned rewound. For relatively little cost (somewhere around \$100) you can purchase a tape rewinder/cleaner that will rewind your tapes and also clean the surface of dirt and grime. We don't recommend getting a local discount store rewinder.

## Tech Talk

Instead, contact video equipment vendors who serve your institution and inquire about video tape rewinder/cleaners. You will more than justify your cost in a very short time, if not in terms of preserving your tapes, then certainly in decreased labor time used for rewinding tapes and decreased wear and tear on whatever VCR you have to use to rewind tapes. Many of the newer VCRs, those that use linear (real time) counters, make contact between the heads and the videotape even when rewinding. Even if your VCR doesn't

make head contact when rewinding, the tension belts and other moving parts are being affected. Besides, if you do rewind all of your tapes, you'll make students happier since their tapes will always begin at the beginning!

*[Editor's Note: materials for this article were provided by Ruth Trometer (M.I.T.), Karen Tusack and Jim Armbrrecht (University of Wisconsin), and The Wisconsin Preservation Project.]*