

How Long Should Digital Storage Media Last?

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Knowing that CDs and DVDs will last for a certain number of years is critical to many government agencies, as well as to hospitals, banks and other organizations that store massive amounts of vital data on optical disks. But, how long is long enough?

To help the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) develop a standard test to estimate the longevity of recordable optical media, the DVD Association (DVDA) and the Government Information Preservation Working Group (GIPWoG) are asking federal agencies and other organizations to answer a very brief survey concerning the longevity of optical media. To participate, see www.itl.nist.gov/div895/gipwog/index.html. The deadline for responding is May 31, 2005.

The test being developed by NIST will not measure actual longevity but will determine the archival quality of the media and whether it will last at least a minimum number of years. The NIST researchers recently tested how well recordable optical disks made with different manufacturing processes held up when exposed to high temperatures, humidity and light levels. They found that some disks can be expected to store data reliably for several tens of years. (A NIST research paper describing the study “Stability Comparison of Recordable Optical Discs,” can be found at www.itl.nist.gov/div895/gipwog/index.html).

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