

HISTORY AT RISK:
A SURVEY TO DETERMINE THE SIZE AND STATUS OF LOCAL TELEVISION NEWS
ARCHIVES IN THE UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT

It is a generally accepted fact that local television news archives are slowly deteriorating. In 1999 the AMIA created the "Preserving Local Television Case Studies and Symposium Project Proposal". One of its goals was a survey of local TV stations to determine how much is at risk. Unfortunately, that was not completed. This project accomplishes part of that goal by surveying 117 local television stations to determine the size and status of their videotape archive. The survey found the average number of videotapes in responding local television stations is nearly 9,000. Of great concern is that nearly one third of the stations said they do not have the necessary equipment to play back all the formats in their archives. Another problem is that less than half of the respondents said their videotape archives are stored under conditions which will ensure long term survival. This survey shows the magnitude of the problem and gives archivists and historians a starting point to lobby for more resources to tackle the challenge of preserving this historical legacy.