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## Photography — Processed photographic colour films and paper prints — Methods for measuring image stability

*Photographie — Films et papiers photographiques couleur traités —  
Méthodes de mesure de la stabilité de l'image*



Reference number  
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## Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

International Standards are drafted in accordance with the rules given in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2.

The main task of technical committees is to prepare International Standards. Draft International Standards adopted by the technical committees are circulated to the member bodies for voting. Publication as an International Standard requires approval by at least 75 % of the member bodies casting a vote.

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights.

ISO 18909 was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 42, *Photography*.

This first edition cancels and replaces ISO 10977:1993, of which it constitutes a technical revision.

## Introduction

This International Standard is one of a series of standards dealing with the physical properties and stability of imaging materials. To facilitate identification of these documents, they are assigned a number within the block from 18900 – 18999 (see Annex A).

This International Standard is divided into two parts. The first covers the methods and procedures for predicting the long-term, dark storage stability of colour photographic images; the second covers the methods and procedures for measuring the colour stability of such images when exposed to light of specified intensities and spectral distribution, at specified temperatures and relative humidities.

Today, the majority of continuous-tone photographs are made with colour photographic materials. The length of time that such photographs are to be kept can vary from a few days to many hundreds of years and the importance of image stability can be correspondingly small or great. Often the ultimate use of a particular photograph may not be known at the outset. Knowledge of the useful life of colour photographs is important to many users, especially since stability requirements often vary depending upon the application. For museums, archives, and others responsible for the care of colour photographic materials, an understanding of the behaviour of these materials under various storage and display conditions is essential if they are to be preserved in good condition for long periods of time.

Organic cyan, magenta and yellow dyes that are dispersed in transparent binder layers coated on to transparent or white opaque supports form the images of most modern colour photographs. Colour photographic dye images typically fade during storage and display; they will usually also change in colour balance because the three image dyes seldom fade at the same rate. In addition, a yellowish (or occasionally other colour) stain may form and physical degradation may occur, such as embrittlement and cracking of the support and image layers. The rate of fading and staining can vary appreciably and is governed principally by the intrinsic stability of the colour photographic material and by the conditions under which the photograph is stored and displayed. The quality of chemical processing is another important factor. Post-processing treatments, such as application of lacquers, plastic laminates and retouching colours, may also affect the stability of colour materials.

The two main factors that influence storage behaviour, or dark stability, are the temperature and relative humidity of the air that has access to the photograph. High temperature, particularly in combination with high relative humidity, will accelerate the chemical reactions that can lead to degradation of one or more of the image dyes. Low-temperature, low-humidity storage, on the other hand, can greatly prolong the life of photographic colour images. Other potential causes of image degradation are atmospheric pollutants (such as oxidizing and reducing gases), micro-organisms and insects.

Primarily the intensity of the illumination, the duration of exposure to light, the spectral distribution of the illumination, and the ambient environmental conditions influence the stability of colour photographs when displayed indoors or outdoors. (However, the normally slower dark fading and staining reactions also proceed during display periods and will contribute to the total change in image quality). Ultraviolet (UV) radiation is particularly harmful to some types of colour photographs and can cause rapid fading as well as degradation of plastic layers such as the pigmented polyethylene layer of resin-coated (RC) paper supports.

In practice, colour photographs are stored and displayed under varying combinations of temperature, relative humidity and illumination, and for different lengths of time. For this reason, it is not possible to precisely predict the useful life of a given type of photographic material unless the specific conditions of storage and display are known in advance. Furthermore, the amount of change that is acceptable differs greatly from viewer to viewer and is influenced by the type of scene and the tonal and colour qualities of the image.

After extensive examination of amateur and professional colour photographs that have suffered varying degrees of fading or staining, no consensus has been achieved on how much change is acceptable for various image quality criteria. For this reason, this International Standard does not specify acceptable end-points for fading and changes in colour balance. Generally, however, the acceptable limits are twice as wide

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for changes in overall image density as for changes in colour balance. For this reason, different criteria have been used as examples in this International Standard for predicting changes in image density and colour balance.

Pictorial tests can be helpful in assessing the visual changes that occur in light and dark stability tests, but are not included in this International Standard because no single scene is representative of the wide variety of scenes actually encountered in photography.

In dark storage at normal room temperatures, most modern colour films and papers have images that fade and stain too slowly to allow evaluation of the dark storage stability simply by measuring changes in the specimens over time. In such cases, too many years would be required to obtain meaningful stability data. It is possible, however, to assess in a relatively short time the probable long-term fading and staining behaviour at moderate or low temperatures by means of accelerated ageing tests carried out at high temperatures. The influence of relative humidity also can be evaluated by conducting the high-temperature tests at two or more humidity levels.

Similarly, information about the light stability of colour photographs can be obtained from accelerated light-stability tests. These require special test units equipped with high-intensity light sources in which test strips can be exposed for days, weeks, months or even years, to produce the desired amount of image fading (or staining). The temperature of the specimens and their moisture content must be controlled throughout the test period, and the types of light sources must be chosen to yield data that can be correlated satisfactorily with those obtained under conditions of normal use.

Accelerated light stability tests for predicting the behaviour of photographic colour images under normal display conditions may be complicated by reciprocity failure. When applied to light-induced fading and staining of colour images, reciprocity failure refers to the failure of many dyes to fade, or to form stain. This even applies when dyes are irradiated with high-intensity versus low-intensity light, even though the total light exposure (intensity  $\times$  time) is kept constant through appropriate adjustments in exposure duration (see [1] in the Bibliography). The extent of dye fading and stain formation can be greater or smaller under accelerated conditions, depending on the photochemical reactions involved in the dye degradation, the kind of dye dispersion, the nature of the binder material, and other variables. For example, the supply of oxygen that can diffuse from the surrounding atmosphere into a photograph's image-containing emulsion layers may be restricted in an accelerated test (dry gelatin is an excellent oxygen barrier). This may change the rate of dye-fading relative to that which would occur under normal display conditions. The temperature and moisture content of the test specimen also influence the magnitude of reciprocity failure. Furthermore, light fading is influenced by the pattern of irradiation (continuous versus intermittent) as well as by light/dark cycling rates.

For all these reasons, long-term changes in image density, colour balance and stain level can be reasonably estimated only for conditions similar to those employed in the accelerated tests, or when good correlation has been confirmed between accelerated tests and actual conditions of use.

In order to establish the validity of the test methods for evaluating the dark and light stability of different types of photographic colour films and papers, the following product types were selected for the tests:

- a) colour negative film with incorporated oil-soluble couplers;
- b) colour negative motion picture pre-print and negative films with incorporated oil-soluble couplers;
- c) colour reversal film with incorporated oil-soluble couplers;
- d) colour reversal film with incorporated Fischer-type couplers;
- e) colour reversal film with couplers in the developers;
- f) silver dye-bleach film and prints;
- g) colour prints with incorporated oil-soluble couplers;
- h) colour motion picture print films with incorporated oil-soluble couplers;

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- i) colour dye imbibition (dye transfer) prints;
- j) integral colour instant print film with dye developers;
- k) peel-apart colour instant print film with dye developers;
- l) integral colour instant print film with dye releasers.

The results of extensive tests with these materials showed that the methods and procedures of this International Standard can be used to obtain meaningful information about the long-term dark stability and the light stability of colour photographs made with a specific product. They also can be used to compare the stability of colour photographs made with different products and to assess the effects of processing variations or post-processing treatments. The accuracy of predictions made on the basis of such accelerated ageing tests will depend greatly upon the actual storage or display conditions.

It must also be remembered that density changes induced by the test conditions and measured during and after the tests include those in the film or paper support and in the various auxiliary layers that may be included in a particular product. With most materials, however, the major changes occur in the dye image layers.

### Stability when stored in the dark

The tests for predicting the stability of colour photographic images in dark storage are based on an adaptation of the Arrhenius method described by Bard *et al.* (see [2] and [3] in the Bibliography) and earlier references by Arrhenius, Steiger and others (see [4], [5], and [6] in the Bibliography). Although this method is derived from well-understood and proven theoretical precepts of chemistry, the validity of its application for predicting changes of photographic images rests on empirical confirmation. Although many chromogenic-type colour products yield image-fading and staining data in both accelerated and non-accelerated dark ageing tests that are in good agreement with the Arrhenius relationship, some other types of products do not.

**NOTE** For example, integral-type instant colour print materials often exhibit atypical staining at elevated temperatures; treatment of some chromogenic materials at temperatures above 80 °C and 60 % RH may cause loss of incorporated high-boiling solvents and abnormal image degradation; and the dyes of silver dye-bleach images deaggregate at combinations of very high temperature and high relative humidity, causing abnormal changes in colour balance and saturation (see [7] in the Bibliography). In general, photographic materials tend to undergo dramatic changes at relative humidities above 60 % (especially at the high temperatures employed in accelerated tests) owing to changes in the physical properties of gelatine.

### Stability when exposed to light

The methods of testing light stability in this International Standard are based on the concept that increasing the light intensity without changing the spectral distribution of the illuminant or the ambient temperature and relative humidity should produce a proportional increase in the photochemical reactions that occur at typical viewing or display conditions, without introducing any undesirable side effects.

However, because of reciprocity failures that are discussed in this Introduction, this assumption does not always apply. Thus, the accelerated light stability test methods described in this International Standard are valid at the specified accelerated test conditions, but may not reliably predict the behaviours of a given product in long-term display under normal conditions.

Translucent print materials, designed for viewing by either reflected or transmitted light (or a combination of reflected and transmitted light), shall be evaluated as transparencies or as reflection prints, depending on how they will be used. Data shall be reported for each condition of intended use.

This International Standard does not specify which of the several light stability tests is the most important for any particular product.