Microfilming Records:
What’s the Difference Between Microfilm and Microfiche?

Purpose: Provide guidance to state and local government agencies on the difference between microfilm and microfiche.

What is microfilm?
Microfilm is a strip of photographic film with small photographs of records arranged in a single stream of images.

What is microfiche?
Microfiche is a small, flat piece of transparent photographic film with small photographs of records arranged in a grid.

Microfilm vs. Microfiche.
- Both take up less space than traditional paper formats such as documents, newspapers, and ledgers.
- Microfilm can hold thousands of images while microfiche can only hold dozens of images.
- Microfilm is organized by reel while microfiche is organized by card.
- Microfilm is easier to index and organize.
- Microfilm can be preserved up to 500 years with proper handling and storage.
- Microfilm can be tested for quality.
- Microfiche cannot be treated for redox (blemishing), which can damage/destroy images.
- Microfiche is more difficult, in terms of time and cost, to digitize than microfilm.

Additional advice regarding the management of public records is available from Washington State Archives:
www.sos.wa.gov/archives
recordsmanagement@sos.wa.gov