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# Technical Reports of the U.S. Government

Karen A. Sinkule / Marilyn K. Moody

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## Technical Reports of the U.S. Government

by Karen A. Sinkule and Marilyn K. Moody

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This survey article provides information on the major federal agencies which distribute technical reports, the major indexing and abstracting tools provided for these reports, and the implications for microfilm librarians in dealing with U.S. technical report literature.

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### Introduction

Technical reports are issued to communicate research findings quickly, as well as to provide a means by which researchers can demonstrate accountability to their funding sources. While technical reports include information that may later be published in scientific journals or books, much of what is found in the technical report literature is never published elsewhere, or is published in much less detail. Large research projects often generate a number of reports, including interim accounts of progress and revisions or updates of previous reports. A comprehensive final report may or may not appear. Because of the somewhat unsystematic nature of technical reporting, the technical report literature represents a "gray" area within scientific publishing which has typically been difficult to control bibliographically.<sup>1</sup>

Although technical reports may be issued by a variety of organizations, such as private corporations, professional associations, research firms, international agencies, and local and state governments, microform librarians in the United States are most likely to encounter the technical report literature of the federal government. U.S. technical reports may be prepared directly by a government agency or by contractors and grantees doing government-sponsored research. The primary distribution format for U.S. technical reports is microfiche.

To process, arrange, file, and page technical reports, and to provide effective assistance to users, the microforms librarian must understand how these reports are generated, assigned report numbers, indexed, and acquired by both individuals and libraries. This article describes the major federal agencies which distribute technical reports, the major indexing and abstracting tools provided for these reports, and the implications for

microform librarians in dealing with U.S. technical report literature. This information should also be of interest to any librarian involved in acquiring technical reports or providing reference service to technical report users.

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The National Technical Information Service (NTIS) is the major source of technical reports in the United States. NTIS is a self-supporting agency of the Department of Commerce. While there have been some attempts recently to privatize some or all of the activities of NTIS, as of this writing those attempts have been unsuccessful. NTIS maintains a permanent collection of over two million titles. Technical reports make up the core of the collection, but also included are periodicals, article reprints, bibliographies, *Tech Notes*, data files, and software programs. Reports result primarily from government-sponsored research, both federal and state, but reports from foreign governments, universities, research organizations, and corporations are also included. Approximately ten percent of the collection is kept in paper copy shelf stock, while the remaining lesser-used titles are reproduced from microform masters on demand.

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