

Title: Polaroid Film Could Be Gone in an Instant
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When Jerry Conlogue heard Polaroid will soon stop producing its instant film, he worried about his mummies. Conlogue uses Polaroid film when he travels deep into the Peruvian jungle to take X-ray photographs of ancient mummies so he doesn't have to lug cumbersome developing chemicals. Now he and other enthusiasts who use the film for art or specialized industrial photography are left wondering where they'll go to stay stocked.

"We're incredibly despondent," said Conlogue, co-director of the Bioanthropology Research Institute at Quinnipiac University in Hamden, Conn., where researchers often visit remote sites to capture X-ray images of mummies. "I don't really feel that there is going to be a replacement for it, which is a real problem."

Concord, Mass.-based Polaroid Corp. announced last week that it plans to close factories in Massachusetts, Mexico and the Netherlands that make film for industrial and consumer uses. Polaroid instant film will be "available in stores into next year," the company said. Meanwhile, Polaroid — which stopped making instant cameras over the past couple years — is seeking a partner to acquire licensing rights, in hopes that another firm will continue making the instant film and keep limited supplies available.

Polaroid introduced its first instant camera in 1948, just as the baby boom got started and parents were looking for new ways to take photos of their kids. Film packs contained the chemicals for developing images inside the camera, and photos emerged from the camera in less than a minute. Although Polaroid instant film may seem an anachronism in an age of digital photography, it's still used for industrial applications.

For example, in medicine, dermatologists use Polaroid film printed with grid patterns to help measure shrinkage in scars over time, said Michael Phelan, a sales manager at Calumet Photographic in Cambridge who works with industrial photography customers.

"There is no substitute for it, and there is no other product out there that is a viable alternative," said Phelan, who said his store has received several calls in recent days from customers worried about Polaroid film supplies.

In medicine, he said, people resisted going digital in some fields, because it is so much more convenient to just snap a Polaroid. "It's easier than having to worry about files, and downloading ... Anyone can pick it up and use it, and walk away with an image in a minute," he said.

Police investigators until recently also relied on Polaroid cameras to produce quick images of crime scenes and evidence. But most have gone to digital, according to some Morris County, New Jersey officials.

"We're all digital these days," said Capt. Curtis James of the Boonton, NJ Police Department.

“It’s probably five years since we used (Polaroids).”

Anne Caccamo, office manager at the Morris County Sheriff’s Department, says her last order for Polaroid film was placed in March 2006. “We still have some, but we stopped using it a while ago.”