Preservation and Care of Philatelic Materials

Subsidiary Page 15
Stick Notes ("Post It" Notes)

It did not take long after their introduction in the late 1970's for 3M's Post-It notes and other self-sticking note tabs to be used by postal historians and others. To most collectors, this was a means of making notes about the cover on a connecting self-stick tab, rather than on the cover itself, and thereby lessening damage to the cover. As a device for holding an idea or making a temporary note, these self stick note tabs rival the paper clip in simplicity of design and ease of use.

These note tabs, though, fail as a means of retaining information for posterity. They have invaded postal history collections and dealers' stocks. They threaten to damage the items with which they come into contact.

The Post-It note came about when Art Fry, a product development specialist at the 3M Company and who also sang in his church choir, had a problem. The paper book marks he used in his hymnal constantly fell out, leaving him searching for the verses. He remembered that some years before, his colleague, Dr. Spencer Silver, had discovered a high tack adhesive that was easy to remove. Mr. Fry soon produced some self sticking book marks at 3M. After months of testing and market research, the 3M Company began to market Post-It notes.

Research scientists have carried out tests that show all notes of this type leave some residue adhesive behind when removed from papers. Analysis shows that the adhesive used on Post-It notes is an acrylate polymer. Adhesive left behind will result in pages sticking together. Dirt will accumulate on the sticky surface, necessitating conservation treatment in order to remove it.

A competitor's product uses a polybutylene base adhesive. These adhesives discolor and lose adhesion over time. The adhesive on self stick notes will also lift some typewriter and electrostatic printing inks and text when placed over a printed area, particularly after a prolonged period.

The paper used for these notes is also of some concern. Most have an acceptable pH level of 5.0 to 8.3. However, these papers contain lignin, indicating a low quality wood pulp and/or alumrosin sizing. Both components contribute to instability and the deterioration of paper. It is recommended that self-stick notes should not be used on covers or objects of importance or value.