



Emergency! If You're First

The following suggestions may help you respond to an emergency affecting cultural property. While an effort has been made to list them in the order in which they can be addressed, you'll need to adapt them to your circumstances. Read the entire document and take the time to plan. It's tempting to "get right to work," but initial organization will save you work and perhaps additional loss. Contact local, regional, or institutional conservation facility, local conservator, or use our Find a Conservator directory. Above all, remember that safety comes first; don't endanger yourself or your staff on behalf of objects.

1. Initial Coordination:

- Try to control or eliminate the source of the problem;
- Turn off the electricity and gas;
- Inform the Director;
- Inform proper civil authorities;
- Find the person in charge of the building (who may or may not be a museum staff person).
- Assessment will begin after the building is declared safe for re-entry.
- Consult your emergency plan.
- Take time to coordinate and plan activities. Officials may prevent re-entry for several days.

2. Priorities:

- Human safety
- Ensure that staff and volunteers have current shots (such as tetanus) and -obtain masks for mold
- Critical operations: equipment, records, forms, information needed to manage salvage and reopen institution
- Make a thorough photographic and written record of emergency conditions and salvage activities
- Assemble collections records: shelf lists, inventory, registrar's logs, etc.
- Stabilize building
- Prioritize collections, from important (valuable; heavily used; significant; vulnerable to irreparable damage) to least important.

3. Designate:

- Emergency coordinator
- Liaison with civil authorities
- Individual with financial authority
- Volunteer coordinator
- Journal keeper and photographer to keep detailed records of damage and -recovery activities
- Individual who can authorize object movement and treatment

4. Secure the site perimeter

5. Establish a communications network

6. Inform your insurance company:

- Document all stages of response photographically and with a written journal



- Accompany the insurance adjuster and all investigating persons and contractors, taking extensive notes of conversations. Such records may be required in court

7. Protection of Artifacts:

- Protect objects by covering, lifting, or evacuating if staff is available and capable
- Diminish mold growth by reducing the temperature and humidity and by promoting air circulation
- Obtain containers and supports for moving and handling objects: plastic crates, polyethylene sheeting, plywood, saw horses, rubber gloves, dollies, carts
- Identify temporary storage
- Set up work areas for items that need to be packed or air dried
- Locate cold storage or freezing facilities
- Handle objects only with rubber gloves, contaminated objects may pose a health hazard
- If time and conditions permit, record objects and destination with film, video, or pencil and paper
- Label object containers

In the Event of Water...

1. Prevention of Further Damage:

- Turn off electricity, blocking entry until done. The power company may have to do this
- Switch off, divert, or sandbag the water source
- Cover drains as soon as possible
- Cover places where water is entering
- Move collections up if water is rising
- Locate pump and fans, and use only if you know the circuitry is dry
- Plan mud removal, remembering that it may be contaminated
- Raise objects out of water
- Cover objects. Check every 24 hours, uncovering if there is a threat of mold
- Secure floating objects
- Locate supplies: containers, uninked newsprint, clean sheeting, blotter paper, toweling, flashlights, batteries, fans, extension cords, work lights, ladders, padding materials, mops, buckets, sponges, hand tools, plastic bags, boots, aprons, tags and labels, scissors, pencils and paper, clipboards, filament tape, waterproof markers, rubber gloves, and a source of clean water
- Contact a preservation architect or engineer if your building is a historic structure, or if a great deal of water has been absorbed. Contact a commercial dehumidification firm if your building is large, based on the advice of an architect or engineer
- Schedule staff and volunteers for work, breaks, and food

2. Basic Drying Procedures

GENERAL: Air Dry means find a cool, dry space with fans. Use absorbent material (uninked newsprint, blotters, paper towels) under objects. Replace absorbent material as it becomes wet. For wet books, documents, photographs, textiles: if these cannot be air-dried within about 48 hours, freeze. If freezer is unavailable, keep as cool as possible with air circulation until air drying is possible. Expect mold growth.

Since most materials become significantly weaker when wet, do not hang wet objects without a conservator's advice.



FRAMED ARTWORKS: Unframe paintings in a safe place. Keep wet paintings horizontal and paint-side up.

ART ON PAPER OR PHOTOS: If image appears stuck to glass/glazing, leave in frame and dry glass-side down.

PHOTOGRAPHS: Rinse mud off photographs (using gentle water stream or by immersion and gentle agitation). Thoroughly wet photographs can stay wet in a container of clean water. Dry or freeze within 48 hours. If possible, interleave photographs with wax paper prior to freezing. Freeze or air dry damp or partially wet photographs.

BOOKS IN QUANTITY: Remove two or three books from each wet or partly wet shelf (to relieve pressure). Evacuate completely or partly wet books. Pack snugly, spine down, and freeze. Leave damp books on shelves if space can be kept cool and dry. Contact a commercial dehumidification firm if space has been flooded.

INDIVIDUAL BOOKS: Air dry, stand upright, and open covers gently to support book.

DOCUMENTS/PAMPHLETS: Remove plastic covers. Air dry flat, in piles no thicker than 1/8" within 48 hours; or pack snugly, upright in original folders (if no folders, pack flat) and freeze.

TEXTILES: Air dry or bag wet textiles in plastic and freeze. Briefly immerse partially wet textiles in clean water, blot, and air dry or freeze.

FURNITURE: Lift furniture above water level. Dab dry with clean cloths. If mud-covered, rinse immediately with clean water. Wrap with plastic and dry slowly, under weights if possible. Leave drawers in place but remove contents.

BASKETS: Pad basketry with uninked newsprint, keep lids on, dry slowly.

LEATHER: Shape, pad, and air dry.

BONE/IVORY: Dab to absorb excess water, place under loose sheets of polyethylene to slow drying.

METAL: Dry metal as quickly as possible, using fans and/or sun.

ANIMAL MATERIALS: Air dry unstuffed specimens and skeletal material on racks in moving air; do not squeeze.

These general recommendations are intended to provide practical guidance in the recovery of water-damaged objects. These recommendations are intended as guidance only and AIC does not assume responsibility or liability for treatment of water-damaged objects.