



Emergency Response and Salvage: Wet Books, Documents & Photographs

Maryland Historical Trust

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Books: Freeze or dry within 48 hours

- If rinsing is necessary, hold book closed.
- Partially wet or damp: stand on top or bottom edge with covers open 90-degree angle; air dry.
- Very wet: lay flat on clean surface; interleave less than 20% of book with absorbent material; replace interleaving when damp.
- If too many books to air dry in 48 hours:
 1. Wrap in freezer or waxed paper. Coated pages will stick together. Interleave if possible.
 2. Pack spine down in sturdy containers.
 3. Freeze [and keep frozen until they can be dried safely].
- Books may be freeze dried.

Paper: Freeze or dry within 48 hours

- Air dry as individual sheets or small piles up to ¼ inch. Interleave; replace interleaving when damp.
- Do not unfold or separate individual, wet sheets.
- If too many items for air drying:
 1. Interleave (by groups or individually) with freezer or waxed paper.
 2. Pack papers or files supported and standing up in sturdy containers; pack containers only 90% full).
 3. Freeze [and keep frozen until they can be dried safely].

Photographs:

- Remove from paper/plastic enclosures or frames. Save all information about the photos.
- Carefully rinse with cool, clean water as necessary.
- Do not touch or blot surfaces.
- Air dry: hang with clips on non-image areas or lay flat on absorbent paper. Keep photos from contact with adjacent surfaces or each other.
- If there are too many for immediate attention, either:
 1. Keep photos (except historic photos) in a container of clean water no more than 48 hours. Air dry.
 2. Freeze if cannot dry in timely manner. If possible, interleave each photo with freezer paper or waxed paper. Do not vacuum dry. Thaw and air dry as soon as possible.
- Do not freeze glass plate negatives.

Notes:

- For large volumes of objects, vacuum freeze-drying is an efficient way to dry out frozen papers or books.
- This information is only part of the disaster response information available on the Emergency Response and Salvage Wheel, copyright 1997, National Institute for the Conservation of

Cultural Property, Inc. Their URL is: <http://www.conservation-us.org/publications/disaster-response-recovery/guides-and-information>.

Consulting a conservator:

- The above steps may be taken without professional assistance. But you may want to consult a paper or photographic conservator when the articles are drying, and in case objects have stuck together when drying.
- The American Institute for the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works maintains an on-line database of conservators available for contract services. The URL is: <http://www.conservation-us.org/membership/find-a-conservator>. There is also a section on this website for disaster response: <http://www.conservation-us.org/publications/disaster-response-recovery>.
- For the Metro DC and Baltimore area, the Washington Conservation Guild has published a guide to conservation and conservators, which lists area contract conservators. The URL is: <http://cool.conservation-us.org/>

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