

**National Park Service  
Hurricane Recovery and Preservation Tips**

**SALVAGING WET BOOKS, DOCUMENTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS**

Water damaged family treasures can be saved! Follow these tips to salvage wet books, documents and photographs. Time is of the essence. Mold can grow in 48 hours.

**SAFETY**

Safety first! Protect yourself from contaminants. Wear

- disposable rubber gloves (latex or nitrile)
- a good quality dust mask (rated N95 is preferred)
- a smock or apron

Afterwards, thoroughly wash your hands and clothing.

**SUPPLIES**

Gather supplies including:

General use

- clean tables
- scissors

For air-drying

- paper towels/cloth towels
- string/clothesline
- clothes pins (wood or plastic)
- water (distilled water, if possible, otherwise running or other bottled)
- plastic wash tubs

For freezing

- waxed paper
- sturdy boxes or milk crates
- re-sealable plastic bags
- packing tape to seal boxes or use as a label
- permanent marking pens to label wrapped objects and boxes
- commercial or home freezer

**AIR-DRYING**

Immediately air-drying wet books, documents and photographs is a viable option if you have a small number of objects, time, and adequate workspace.

- Rinse book covers, documents and photographs that are very wet and dirty with clean water prior to air-drying. Hold books tightly shut during rinsing.

- Books: Interleave the pages at intervals (every 25 to 50 pages) with an absorbent material, such as paper towel, and lay them flat to air-dry. If books are only slightly wet and in good condition, stand them on their spines and fan the pages. If books are extremely wet do not open.
- Documents: Spread them individually on absorbent material for air-drying or interleave small stacks with paper towel.
- Photographs: Dry them individually, face up, on absorbent material. Avoid puddles on the surface of the photographs by hanging them individually on a clothesline with clothespins. Avoid contact with photographic emulsions.

## **FREEZING FOR LATER TREATMENT**

Freezing for later treatment is an alternative to immediate air-drying. Use any commercial or home freezer.

- Identify and separately package valuable items that you may want a conservator to later examine and treat after thawing.
- Books: Wrap with waxed paper and place spine down in boxes or milk crates. Do not layer books; one layer only. Pack books snugly so they don't slump or shift. Avoid freezing leather bindings.
- Photographs: If possible, interleave with waxed paper and place in re-sealable plastic bags.
- Documents: If possible, interleave folders or small stacks with waxed paper and place in a box or re-sealable plastic bags.
- Label objects on the wrapper or box and place packages in freezer.
- Deliver frozen valuable items to a conservator. For a list of conservators in your area, see The American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works web site at [aic.stanford.edu/public/select.html](http://aic.stanford.edu/public/select.html).
- Thaw remaining items slowly for processing.
- Process items according to air-drying instructions.

For further information, see:

- *Saving Flood Damaged Photographs*. Popular Photography & Imaging. September 2005 ([www.poppphoto.com/article.asp?section\\_id=5&article\\_id=1545](http://www.poppphoto.com/article.asp?section_id=5&article_id=1545))
- *National Park Service: Wet Collection Recovery*. Conserve O Grams on salvaging water damaged cultural objects, including paper-based collections, textiles, natural history collections, and more. ([www.nps.gov/hfc/products/cons/wet-recovery.htm](http://www.nps.gov/hfc/products/cons/wet-recovery.htm))

Theresa Voellinger Shockey  
 Assistant Paper Conservator  
 Harpers Ferry Center  
 National Park Service  
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