



Conserve O Gram

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Salvage At A Glance Part III: Object Collections

Museum object collections typically contain both organic and inorganic materials. The type of material will determine treatment priority during water emergencies. Treat organic objects first because they are the most susceptible to damage by water. Inorganic objects such as glass, ceramics, and metals are more resistant to water damage, and brief periods of contact should not cause long-term damage. Some exceptions to this are iron, which will corrode quickly, and unfired or low-fired ceramics, which are porous. Separate these objects from those that do not require immediate attention.

Allow inorganic objects to air dry. However, objects damaged by saltwater should be kept wet in freshwater until a conservator determines appropriate treatment. As saltwater-soaked objects dry, salts can migrate to the surface and crystallize. This results in flaking or loss of the object surface.

When air-drying objects:

- lay out objects to allow for even drying
- raise objects off the ground or on tables with screens or pallets to allow air circulation
- use fans to circulate air but be sure they do not blow directly on objects

Use caution when handling reconstructed objects because those mended with a water-soluble adhesive may become unstable.

Leather objects may require special attention while drying. Some leather objects are intended to be flexible (buckskin) while others are not (shields, fire buckets). Flexible leather may need to be manipulated while drying to retain its flexibility. Consult a conservator to determine appropriate procedures for leather materials.

Note: When salvaging collections it is imperative to keep labels and tags with objects so that identification information is not lost.

Organic Materials

<i>Material</i>	<i>Priority</i>	<i>Handling Precautions</i>	<i>Packing Method</i>	<i>Drying Method</i>
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Bone & Ivory

	Treat within 24 hours.	Handle with care—wet objects may be fragile.	Wrap individually in absorbent material.	Air dry. Use fans.
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<i>Material</i>	<i>Priority</i>	<i>Handling Precautions</i>	<i>Packing Method</i>	<i>Drying Method</i>
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Shell

	Treat within 24 hours.	Handle with care—wet objects may be fragile.	Wrap individually in absorbent material.	Air dry. Use fans.
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Skin & Leather

Tanned	Treat within 24 hours.	Handle with care—wet leather is fragile.	Pad with towel- ing to maintain shape and pro- vide support.	Air dry. Use fans.
Semi-tanned or Un-tanned	Treat within 24 hours.	Handle with care—may be fragile when wet.	Pad with towel- ing to maintain shape and pro- vide support.	Air dry. Use fans.

Wood

	Treat within 24 hours.	Lift from bottom of object.	Wrap in absor- bent materials.	Air dry slowly.
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Basketry

	Treat within 24 hours.	Lift from bottom of object.	Pad with towel- ing to maintain shape.	Air dry slowly. Keep lids on.
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Inorganic Materials**Ceramics**

Sun baked or Terracotta	Treat within 24 hours to prevent disintegration and loss of sur- face.	Watch for crack- ing or peeling. Blot dry—do not rub.	Wrap with paper towels or other absorbent material.	Air dry. Use fans.
Low-Fired Ceramics	Treat within 48 hours.	Watch for crack- ing or peeling. Pat dry—do not rub.	Wrap with paper towels or other absorbent material.	Air dry. Use fans.
High-Fired Ceramics	Treat after less stable materials.	If the surfaces are stable, blot with lint-free towels.	Wrap with paper towels or other absorbent material.	Air dry. Use fans.

<i>Material</i>	<i>Priority</i>	<i>Handling Precautions</i>	<i>Packing Method</i>	<i>Drying Method</i>
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Metal

	Treat unstable (corroded) metals within 48 hours. Treat stable metal after less stable materials.	Use gloves when handling. If the surfaces are stable, blot with lint-free towels.	Wrap with absorbent materials. Pack copper alloys in individual containers with silica gel.	Air dry. Use fans.
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Stone

	Treat after less stable materials.	If object has smooth surface, blot. If surface is rough or has an applied finish, do not blot.	Wrap with absorbent materials.	Air dry. Use fans.
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Glass

	Treat after less stable materials.	Pat dry, do not rub.	Wrap with absorbent materials.	Air dry. Use fans.
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References

Upton, M.S. and C. Pearson. "Emergency Treatment of Materials." In *Care of Collections*, edited by Simon Knell, 262 –275. London: Routledge, 1994.

World Wide Web Resources

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). "Emergency Salvage Wheel." <<http://www.fema.gov/r-n-r/salvage.htm>>.

Minnesota Historical Society. "Salvage Procedure for Water Damaged Collections." <<http://mnhs.org/preserve/conservation/recovery/recovery.html>>.

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