

# Salvage At A Glance Part IV: Natural History Collections

Natural history collections may contain biological, geological, and paleontological specimens. Biological collections may include both wet and dry specimens. Dry specimens require immediate attention during a water emergency because they are highly susceptible to mold growth. Skins and furs may require additional brushing or vacuuming with a covered nozzle when dry to remove dirt or mold.

Fluid preserved collections also require immediate attention so that objects do not dry or shrivel. These collections may be intact in their container in which case drying off the container is all that is necessary. However, if containers are broken care must be taken to retain identification labels with the correct specimens. The specimens should then be rinsed and stored in fresh liquid. If specimens are dried or shriveled, they may require additional soaking in a preservative. Consult the chart below for emergency procedures for exposed fluid preserved specimens. Consult a conservator for appropriate treatment. Herbarium specimens require special attention due to their delicate nature and the potential for mold growth. Separate these specimens with plastic right away to prevent them from sticking together. Begin to air dry specimens in a dry, well ventilated room to reduce the potential for fungal growth. Consult a conservator as soon as possible.

Geological specimens can also require special consideration depending on their composition. Consult this chart for emergency procedure and contact a conservator to determine further appropriate measures.

*Note:* When handling natural history collections, wear protective clothing such as an apron, gloves, and goggles. Use a respirator when necessary. Some specimens may contain toxic materials. See *Conserve O Gram* 2/13 for guidance on respirator use.

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Material	Priority	Handling Precautions	Packing Method	Drying Method
<b>Biological Speci</b>	mens			
Animal Skins and Taxidermy Mounts	Treat within 24 hours to prevent mold growth.	Avoid direct handling. Many stuffed mounts may contain arsenic or other pesticides.	Separate items with freezer or wax paper. Isolate from other objects in boxes with plastic sheeting.	Air dry slowly.

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Material Priority Handling Precautions	Packing Method	Drying Method
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## **Biological Specimens**

Herbarium Specimens	Treat within 24 hours to prevent mold growth.	Avoid direct handling.	Separate with plas- tic sheeting, freezer or wax paper.	Air dry with good ventilation. Consult a conservator.
Fluid Preserved Collections	Treat within 24 hours to prevent objects from drying or shriv- eling.	Avoid direct handling.	Place specimens and labels in sealed polyethylene boxes with a small amount of alcohol.	Rinse with distilled water or a preserva- tive. Store in new jar with fresh liquid or preservative.
Pinned Insects	Treat within 24 hours to prevent mold growth.	Handle with care—wet specimens may be fragile.	Ensure pins are secured and speci- men trays/boxes are supported.	Air dry with good ventilation.

## **Geological Specimens**

Geological Specimens	Treat within 48 hours.	Handle with care—wet specimens may be fragile.	Wrap with paper towels or other absorbent material.	Air dry slowly. Consult a conser- vator; some speci- mens should be
				dried quickly.

## Paleontological Specimens

Paleontological	Treat within	Handle with	Wrap individually	Air dry slowly.
Specimens	48 hours.	care—wet speci-	with absorbent	Use ties to hold
		mens may be	material.	fragile or repaired
		fragile.		specimens while
				drying.

#### Conserve O Gram 21/7

#### National Park Service

### References

Ball, C. and A. Yardley-Jones, Eds. *Help! A* Survivor's Guide to Emergency Preparedness.Edmonton, Canada: Museums Alberta, 2001.

Carter, David and Annette K. Walker. *Care* and Conservation of Natural History Collections. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1999.

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/rrr/ers\_w12.shtm >.

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