



# Recovering Personal Items Following a Flood

## INITIAL RESPONSE

If environmental conditions are not addressed after a water problem, mold will begin to develop in as little as 72 hours, spreading rapidly thereafter.

It is important to wear protective clothing. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend wearing waterproof boots and gloves to avoid floodwater touching your skin. Wash your hands often with soap and clean water or use a hand-cleaning gel with alcohol in it.

## DRYING

Water damaged items can be air dried. This is the most suitable option for small numbers of items.

## DOCUMENTS

Separate single paged documents immediately to prevent adhesion. Wet paper is extremely fragile and easily torn or damaged, handle materials gently.

1. Identify a dry, secure space where items can dry.
2. Keep the air moving at all times using fans in the drying area if possible. This will accelerate the drying process and discourage mold growth. Aim fans to direct the airflow parallel to the drying records. **DO NOT** point the fans directly at the documents.
3. Single leaves can be laid out on tables, floors, and other flat surfaces protected by paper towels.
4. If records are printed on coated paper, they must be separated from one another to prevent them from sticking.
5. Once dry, records may be rehoused in clean folders and boxes, and should be digitized/scanned to create a digital copy. Dried records will always occupy more space than ones that have never been water damaged.

## BOOKS

1. Identify a dry, secure space where the books can dry.
2. Keep the air moving at all times using fans in the drying area. This will accelerate the drying process and discourage mold growth. Aim fans to direct the airflow parallel to the drying volumes. **DO NOT** point the fans directly at the books.
3. If the book is damp or the edges of the book are only slightly wet, the book may be stood on end and fanned open slightly in a space with good air circulation, but again, do not aim fans directly at the books. To minimize distortion, press under a board with a weight just before drying is complete. Paper- or cloth-covered bricks work well for weights.
4. If the book is slightly wet, interleave approximately every 16 pages, starting from the back of the book, turning pages carefully. For interleaving, use paper towels or clean, unprinted newsprint. Do not interleave too much or the spine will become concave and the volume distorted. Close the book gently and place it flat on several sheets of absorbent paper. Change the interleaving and absorbent paper frequently. Turn the book from front to back each time it is interleaved. When the book is damp, proceed as in step 3.



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5. Dampness will persist for some time inside the book in the gutter, along the spine, and in the boards. Due to their thickness, the boards retain moisture much longer; mold is often found between the boards and flyleaves if the book is not allowed to dry completely. Check for mold growth frequently while books are drying.
6. When books are dry but still cool to the touch, they should be closed, laid flat on a table or other horizontal surface, gently formed into their original shape, and held in place with a board and weight. Press overnight and set up to dry during the day and repeat until books are dry.

### PHOTOGRAPHS

In general, films (plastic-based materials) appear to be more stable than prints (paper-based materials); therefore, prints should be salvaged first. Important exceptions include deteriorated nitrate and safety films, which are extremely susceptible to water damage.

If immediate drying is not possible, or photographs are stuck together, freeze them. Wrap or interleave photographs with waxed paper before freezing.

Frozen photographs are best dried by thawing, followed by air drying. As a stack of photographs thaws, individual photographs can be carefully peeled from the group and placed face up on a clean, absorbent surface to air dry.

*To air dry:*

1. Separate photographs from their enclosures, frames, and from each other. If they are stuck together or adhered to glass, set them aside for freezing and consultation with a professional at a later time if irreplaceable.
2. If the photographs have excessive dirt or grime, they can be submerged in clean water briefly and then cleaned gently by blotting with a soft cloth. Do not scratch off dirt as dirt can scratch the photograph.
3. Allow excess water to drain off the photographs.
4. Spread the photographs out to dry, face up, laying them flat on an absorbent material such as blotters, a screen, unprinted newsprint, paper towels, or a clean cloth.
5. Keep the air around the drying materials moving at all times. Fans will speed up the drying process and minimize the risk of mold growth.
6. Negatives should be dried vertically. They can be hung on a line with plastic clips placed at the edges.
7. Photographs may curl during drying. They can be flattened later.
8. Once dry, the photographs should be digitized/scanned to create a digital copy.



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## SOURCES

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/returnhome.asp>

Northeast Document Conservation Center

<https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/disaster-assistance/emergency-phone-assistance>

“Save your photos from flood damage” – WIS segment

<http://www.wistv.com/story/30221990/save-your-photos-from-flood-damage>

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

“Disaster Recovery: Salvaging Books” – Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts

[http://www.ccaha.org/uploads/media\\_items/technical-bulletin-salvaging-books.original.pdf](http://www.ccaha.org/uploads/media_items/technical-bulletin-salvaging-books.original.pdf)

“Guidelines on Assessment and Remediation of Fungi in Indoor Environments” – New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, November 2008

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/epi/epi-mold-guidelines.pdf>

“Indoor Mold After South Carolina’s Severe Flooding 2015” – DHEC

<http://dc.statelibrary.sc.gov/handle/10827/19762>