



american
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**Preserving Cultural
Heritage**

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Salvaging Water-Damaged Textiles

When Textiles Are Wet

After the flood waters have receded and officials declare it safe to return to your property you can take action to salvage and minimize damage to textiles such as clothes, quilts, costumes, laces, needlework, or tapestries. Because of the varied nature of textiles, they may exhibit different responses to moisture, but most will be weaker and heavier when wet and will require extra care when handling. Here are a few tips to help you salvage your valued textiles.

Careful Handling

- Beware of serious health hazards associated with mud and mold. Wear plastic disposable gloves, protective clothing, goggles, and, if possible, use a respirator.
- If your textiles have been insured, photograph the textiles before you take steps to salvage them and document your efforts.
- If a wet textile needs to be moved, use a solid support or stretched canvas to carry it.
- Do not attempt to unfold extremely delicate fabrics if the fragile layers are stuck together. Wait until they are dry and consult a conservator.

Cleaning

To remove mud and debris, re-wet the textile with gently flowing clean water or with a fine hose spray.

Drying

- Gently press water out with the palm of your hand. Do not wring or twist dry.
- Remove excess water with dry towels, blotting paper, or unprinted newsprint. This is especially important if the dyes are bleeding.
- Avoid stacking textiles during the drying process.
- Reshape the textile while it is still damp to approximate its original contours.

Ventilation

- Do not place textiles in sealed plastic bags.
- Air dry indoors with the lights on to inhibit mold growth.
- Circulate the air with air conditioning, fans, and open windows to inhibit mold growth.
- Use a dehumidifier in the room with the wet textiles. Drain the collecting container often.

Professional Help

A textile conservator may be needed to assess the damage and recommend appropriate treatment. [Find a Conservator online](#) or contact the American Institute for Conservation at (202) 452-9545 for information on how to locate a conservator.

