

# FOOLS RUSH IN

## HOW TO CREATE A DISASTER SALVAGE LAB & MAINTAIN YOUR SANITY

In 2008, the University of Iowa Libraries adapted its Conservation Lab to become a flood recovery lab. The UI Libraries took in items for the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library, the African American Museum of Iowa, the Johnson County Historical Society, and the Linn County Recorder's Office. Staff began salvage work as the flood waters receded.

### KNOW YOUR LIMITS

Before salvage efforts began, every responder got a booster for tetanus and respirator fit tests. Proper protective equipment was required and consisted of respirators, nitrile gloves, Tyvek suits, and rubber boots. Staff were encouraged to take frequent breaks and to shower at the conclusion of their shift. Though immediate and quick response was essential for the collections, staff worked within set hours.

Staff evacuated a wide variety of materials from the museums and libraries. Many books and papers, but also textiles, wood sculpture, metal objects, musical instruments, and even archaeological samples. Storage, work space, and the number of responders were limited.



### BUILD & RELY ON LOCAL NETWORKS

Many materials were unfamiliar to our staff so we sought the expertise of conservators trained in various media. Professionals gave us hands on training to stabilize several objects. Items requiring specialized skills, equipment, or were of high value were sent out to experts.

After triage and inventory we began the recovery process. Individuals within the Iowa City and Cedar Rapids communities volunteered time to perform simple and straightforward tasks, like dry cleaning and rehousing.

During the eight year project, we employed fifteen University of Iowa Center for the Book students and relied on three long term volunteers.



### FIND NEW WAYS TO UTILIZE YOUR RESOURCES

Storage and assessment space were provided by the University of Iowa in a partially vacated building that was slated for future demolition.

The University of Iowa Center for the Book Paper & Research Facility lent us space to muck out phonographic records. We retrofitted the paper drying rack, placing felt between the marbles and the records. Conservator Gary Frost devised an efficient method for flattening warped text-blocks using our vacuum sealer.



### REMAIN REALISTIC

As it is impossible to predict all of the obstacles that may be encountered, flexibility was necessary. Items initially salvaged later proved to be too damaged to further treat. Costs and time for the recovery were underestimated, and the first two years of the project was not financially solvent. Ongoing communication with the curators at the three institutions allowed us to change priorities and working methods.

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