



american
institute for
conservation

**Preserving Cultural
Heritage**

727 15th St NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20005

(t) 202.452.9545
(f) 202.452.9328

Saving Photographs After the Flood

"Photographs and photo albums are often the only records of momentous occasions like weddings, birthdays, and graduations," Sarah Wagner, senior photograph conservator at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) said. "If the flood has damaged them, saving them may be possible. Remember that if flood waters did not damage the negatives, you can make new prints anytime."

Damaged photographs for which there are no negatives should receive attention first. Once photographs have stuck together or become moldy, saving them may not be possible. Handle wet photos carefully; the surfaces may be fragile. Wet photos may be rinsed in clean water (if needed) and sealed in a plastic garbage bag with a tie or a ziploc type plastic bag. If possible, put wax paper between each photograph. If a freezer is available, freeze the photos immediately. Later, the photos may be defrosted, separated, and air-dried.

If no freezer or refrigerator is available, rinse wet photos in clean water and dry them, face up, in a single layer on a clean surface (a table, window screen, or clean plastic laid out on the ground. Avoid drying the photos in direct sunlight. Don't worry if the photos curl as they dry. A photo expert can be contacted later about flattening them.

"Conservators can help you with severely damaged and valuable materials," Wagner said.
[Find a Conservator here](#) or contact AIC at (202) 452-9545, info@culturalheritage.org.