



THE FOUNDATION
OF THE AMERICAN
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CONSERVATION
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Advice for Saving Damaged Family Treasures

Follow these steps to halt further damage

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- As the threat of flooding persists in Texas, residents in affected towns and cities are being urged to seek higher ground. When the flooding ends, residents will begin the long journey of recovery. With homes flooded and lives upended, treasured possessions such as family heirlooms, photos, and other keepsakes become more cherished. Unless they are contaminated by sewage or chemicals, these treasures can be saved. The Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation (FAIC) offers these basic guidelines from professional conservators for individuals who discover their family treasures have been damaged:

- **Safety First!** With any disaster there may be health risks. Wear long sleeves, sturdy shoes, and plastic or rubber gloves during cleanup. Protective gear such as goggles and a fitted face mask is recommended if there is mold.
- **Prevent Mold.** Mold can form within 48 hours; you will need to work fast. The goal is to reduce the humidity and temperature around your treasures as you proceed to clean and dry them. If you do encounter extensive mold, use protective gear such as gloves, goggles, and an N100 face mask, available at most hardware stores.
- **Air-Dry.** Gentle air-drying is best for all your treasured belongings—indoors, if possible. Hair dryers, irons, ovens, and prolonged exposure to sunlight will do irreversible damage. Increase indoor airflow with fans, open windows, air conditioners, and dehumidifiers.
- **Handle with Care.** Use great caution in handling your heirlooms, which can be especially fragile when wet. Separate damp materials: remove the contents from drawers; take photographs out of damp albums; remove paintings and prints from frames; place paper towels between the pages of wet books.
- **Clean Gently.** Loosen dirt and debris on fragile objects gently with soft brushes and cloths. Avoid rubbing, which can grind in dirt.
- **Salvage Photos.** Clean photographs by rinsing them carefully in clean water. Air-dry photos on a plastic screen or paper towel, or by hanging them by the corner with plastic clothespins. Don't let the image come into contact with other surfaces as it dries.
- **Prioritize.** You may not be able to save everything, so focus on what's most important to you, whether for historic, monetary, or sentimental reasons.

- **Can't Do It All?** Damp objects and items that cannot be dealt with immediately should be put in open, unsealed boxes or bags. Photos, papers, books, and textiles should be frozen if you can't get them dry within 48 hours.
- **Call in a Pro.** If a precious item is badly damaged, a conservator may be able to help. Be sure to collect broken pieces. Set your treasure aside in a well-ventilated room until you find professional help. If a precious item has been exposed to contaminated water, seek a conservator's advice on salvaging it; your health and safety, and that of your loved ones, is of utmost importance. To locate a conservator, go to www.conservation-us.org/findaconservator on the website of the American Institute for Conservation.

A free, online video guide demonstrating how to rescue soaked photographs, books, documents, and other valued items is available from Heritage Preservation. This 10-minute streaming video provides professional advice that benefits families as well as museum and library staff. View and link to the video at:

<http://www.heritagepreservation.org/PROGRAMS/WaterSegmentFG.HTM>

Additional resources for salvaging flood-damaged materials can be found here:

<http://www.heritagepreservation.org/PROGRAMS/flood.html>

These recommendations are intended as guidance only. FAIC assumes no responsibility or liability for treatment of damaged objects.

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About FAIC

FAIC, the Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works, supports conservation education, research, and outreach activities that increase understanding of our global cultural heritage.

About AIC

The American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works is a national membership organization supporting the professionals who preserve our cultural heritage. AIC plays a crucial role in establishing and upholding professional standards, promoting research and publications, providing educational opportunities, and fostering the exchange of knowledge among conservators, allied professionals, and the public. Learn more about AIC at www.conservation-us.org.