



MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Disaster Salvage Tip Sheet

General Advice

Bob Herskovitz, the Society's Outreach Conservator, offered the following tips based on recommendations from the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC) and the National Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Property (NIC):

- Documents, books, photographs and works of art on paper may be extremely fragile when wet; use caution when handling. Free the edges of prints and paper objects in mats and frames, if possible. These should be allowed to air dry. Rinse mud off wet photographs with clear water, but do not touch surfaces. Sodden books and papers should also be air dried, or may be kept in a refrigerator or freezer until they can be treated by a professional conservator.
- If the object is still wet, rinse with clear, clean water or a fine hose spray. Clean off dry silt and debris from your belongings with soft brushes or dab with damp cloths without grinding debris into objects.
- Air dry objects indoors if possible. Sunlight and heat may dry certain materials too quickly, causing splitting, warping and buckling.
- Furniture finishes and painting surfaces may develop a white haze or bloom from contact with water and humidity. These problems do not require immediate attention.
- Textiles, leather and other "organic" materials also will be severely affected by exposure to water and should be allowed to air dry.
- Rinse metal objects exposed to rain waters, mud or silt with clear water and dry immediately with a clean, soft cloth. Allow heavy mud deposits on large metal objects, such as sculpture, to dry. Caked mud can be removed later.
- Remove wet paintings from the frame but not from the stretcher. Air dry, face up, away from direct sunlight.
- If objects are broken or begin to fall apart, place all broken pieces, bits of veneer, and detached parts in clearly labeled open containers. Do not attempt to repair objects until they are completely dry or, in the case of important materials, until you have consulted with a professional conservator.
- The best way to inhibit growth of mold and mildew is to reduce humidity. Increase airflow with fans, open windows, air conditioners and dehumidifiers.
- Remove heavy deposits of mold growth from walls, baseboards, floors and other household surfaces with commercially available disinfectants. Avoid the use of disinfectants on historic wallpapers.

Society conservators can offer initial advice over the phone as well as send appropriate materials by mail, fax or e-mail. The Conservation Department's phone number is 651/259-3388; in greater Minnesota, people can call toll-free by dialing 1-800-657-3773. The Society's special e-mail address for assistance with disaster recovery is conservationhelp@mnhs.org.

Historic Structures and Sites

Historic properties are often tragically lost in weather-related disasters such as floods and tornadoes. When disaster occurs, it is important to remember not to make hasty decisions. Structural damages and conditions affecting safety must receive first consideration. Remove hazards immediately, taking care to retain as many of the materials that are pertinent to the building as possible. Owners should consult architects, engineers and experienced contractors during the decision-making process. A disaster response plan for historic properties in Minnesota can be found at: <http://www.mnhs.org/shpo/disaster/toc.htm>.

The Society's State Historic Preservation Office can offer advice and direction in the decision-making process when disasters occur that have affected historic buildings and sites. Requests for assistance should be directed to the State Historic Preservation Office at 651/259-3450, or by e-mail: mnshpo@mnhs.org, or markbuechel@mnhs.org.

Records and Documents

The Society's disaster response plans include offering assistance related to crucial records to business owners, officials of cities, townships and school boards who have suffered damage of government documents and library materials. Officials at all levels of government with questions about damage to their records should call the Society's State Archives Department at 651/259-3260, or e-mail: charles.rodgers@mnhs.org.

Helpful Resources

For a guide to procedures for the recovery of water-damaged items, go to the Minnesota Historical Society's online emergency response web page at: <http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/conservation/emergency.html>

For an additional guide on recovery procedures for water-damaged books, papers, and other collections and material, visit:

<http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/waac/wn/wn10/wn10-2/wn10-202.html>

This is an article by Betty Walsh originally published in the newsletter of the Western Association of Art Museums (WAAC).

For tips from FEMA on recovering water-damaged items, visit:

<http://www.fema.gov/hazard/flood/coping.shtm>

For links to other documents with flood and disaster response information and instructions, visit: <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/bytopic/disasters/>

There you will find information from the Library of Congress, the National Archives, the National Park Service, the National Media Lab, and others providing useful and practical information.

This information is distributed by the Conservation Outreach Program of the Minnesota Historical Society as a public service. The distribution of this handout does not constitute recommendation of a technique for any specific application by the Society, and the Society will not assume liability for the results of the application. Each application must be evaluated individually, and materials and techniques selected that best suit the condition of the object and how it is to be used. If you have questions about a particular application, please contact the Society's Conservation Outreach Program at: 651-259-3388, 1-800-657-3773, FAX at 651-296-9961 or e-mail at conservationhelp@mnhs.org.