

## Basic Guidelines for Salvaging Paper-Based Materials with Water Damage

1. **Personal Safety First!** Consider all flood water and sewage-related pipe water to be contaminated and protect yourself from the water and residues from the flooding. Be certain that electricity is not an issue before entering a water-damaged building. Turn off all utilities in the building before entering.

Never enter a building until it has been deemed safe to do so. Always wear protective gloves and footwear.

2. **Assess and document the damage.** Identify the types of damage and extent. What types of materials have been affected? Take photographs and video of the damage before doing anything else. This is especially crucial for insurance claims! Be deliberately slow with this phase – you can make a much bigger mess by jumping in too quickly than taking time to make a clear and thoughtful plan for salvage.

Start creating a priority list of items for salvage. Trained conservators can provide advice on determining the most vulnerable items and how to stabilize them.

3. **Stabilize the environment.** Water-damaged collections and buildings must be dried out as quickly as possible to minimize the chance of mold outbreaks. When possible, open windows to increase air circulation. Once it is safe to use electricity, install fans and dehumidifiers.

Remove any “disposable” water-logged materials such as carpets, rugs, and draperies. The objective is to dry out the area as quickly as possible.

Don't overlook the likely need for increased security at this phase and throughout the rest of the response activities.

4. **Organize and start the salvage process.** Designate an emergency response coordinator and communicate with any volunteers. Inform your insurance company about the event ASAP and keep clear records of the damage (written and photographic).

Deal with the high-priority items first –these may be items that are the most valuable or significant, heavily used, or vulnerable to irreparable damage. Remember that paper materials are usually much heavier and weaker when wet so use extra care when lifting or moving a wet object – it may require additional support to be moved safely. If water damage is extensive, consider freeze-drying materials if appropriate. Consult a professional conservator for specific advice.

Don't forget to document the process with photographs and written notes!

## Disaster Response Assistance and Additional Information

AIC-NHR Hotline and Website <https://www.culturalheritage.org/resources/emergencies/national-heritage-responders>

24-hour assistance from trained volunteers is available to cultural institutions through the American Institute of Conservation's National Heritage Responders hotline for cultural institutions on **202.661.8068**. Less urgent enquires can be sent via email to [emergencies@culturalheritage.org](mailto:emergencies@culturalheritage.org). Additional information

can also be found on their website, including what to do if you are first on the scene and tips for the care of water-damaged paper-based collections.

**AIC Disaster Response Guides** <https://www.culturalheritage.org/resources/emergencies/disaster-response-recovery>

Detailed guides for dealing with water-damaged paper-based collections, textiles and photographs as well as tips on how to respond to an emergency if you are the first on the scene.

**AIC Find A Conservator Service** <https://www.culturalheritage.org/membership/find-a-conservator>

AIC can help you find a conservator in your area by calling their office on 202.452-9545. They also offer an online directory on their main webpage under the Find a Conservator heading

**NEDCC Collections Emergency Hotline** <https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/disaster-assistance/>

The Northeast Document Conservation Center, located in Andover, MA, is available to take calls from institutions with collections damage, as well as private individuals whose family collections are damaged. The number to call during business hours (8:30-4:30 EST) is 978-470-1010. The number to call after hours (also answered during the day) is 855-245-8303. NEDCC can also be reached at [info@nedcc.org](mailto:info@nedcc.org).

**VACDaRN (Vermont Arts & Culture Resilience Network)** <https://vacdarn.org/>

VACDaRN is a partnership of the Vermont Arts Council, the Vermont State Archives and Records Administration, and the Vermont Emergency Management Association. Coordination through this network enables artists as well as arts and heritage organizations to work together to share expertise and resources, mobilize response for mutual assistance during emergencies, and engage collectively with first responders and government emergency management agencies. The organization can be reached by phone at 802-622-4092 and by email [vacdarn@gmail.com](mailto:vacdarn@gmail.com).

There are several Vermont-specific disaster plan templates available for free on the VACDaRN website:

- Council of State Archivists' [Pocket Response Plan](#), "PReP" templates:
  - PReP template specific to [Vermont public libraries](#)
  - PReP template specific to [Vermont municipalities](#)
- Vermont-specific [simple disaster plan template](#)

**Works on Paper Conservation** <http://www.worksonpaperconservation.com/>

Private paper conservation studio located in Bellows Falls, Vermont. Carolyn Frisa is experienced with salvaging water-damaged paper materials such as prints, documents, books, photographs, maps, and drawings. She is also part of the AIC National Heritage Responders Team and can provide advice on disaster salvage. She can be reached by phone at 802.460.1149 (studio) or 802.289.4309 (cellphone) or by email [carolyn@works-on-paper.net](mailto:carolyn@works-on-paper.net).