

University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio Libraries

Briscoe Library Disaster Plan

**APPENDIX 5: Packing and Removal of Wet Library Materials**

NOTE: These procedures should only be followed in case BMS Catastrophe cannot provide help for some reason. It is best to leave wet books and records where they are so that unintended damage does not occur.

Identify and secure before packing begins:

Place (air-drying location, freezer, storage space)

Transportation

Packing area, with room to sort and pack materials

Loading area for receipt of supplies and shipping of wet books

Route by which materials will be removed from the building Rest area for workers, organize refreshments, etc.

**Workers**

Salvage is taxing on workers. Plan breaks for rest and refreshments about every hour and a half or more frequently as needed.

Identify and enlist Library staff members who have preservation training

Consider enlisting others who are willing to help

Consider paid temporary employees or volunteers

**Equipment**

Plastic crates or cardboard boxes

Waxed paper or freezer wrap

Water proof marking pens, clipboards, paper, tags for labeling boxes and recording contents

Fans, dehumidifiers, electric generators

Book trucks, hand truck to move boxes

**Sorting and Packing**

The Disaster Team Leader organizes the workers into teams of 3 or 4 people and assigns tasks.

**Tasks**

- Bring, prepare, and assemble packing materials.
- Do not open saturated books—wet paper tears easily! If books are stuck together, do not separate them!
- Remove damaged materials. Wrap each wet book in freezer paper (waxed side next to volume) and place it in plastic crate spine down.
- During packing sort material (and label boxes) for air-drying, freezing, special processing, direct return to shelf (when conditions permit), and for discard.
- Record (in summary) what is being removed and label boxes.
- Move crates and boxes to loading point and load truck.

### **Priorities**

- Start removing materials from the areas closest to the point of access and work back.
- Clear aisles and passageways first. Use a human chain to pass items out separately to a packing area. When the aisles are clear bring the packing crates to the shelves.
  - Remove the wettest books first. If water has come from above, start working with the top shelves, if from below, with the bottom shelves.
- Keep accurate records of the locations from which materials are removed.
- If the packing and removal operation will take more than 10 hours, loosen tightly packed shelves or boxes so the books and paper do not jam as they swell. Otherwise, leave material packed together on shelves or in record boxes where it will present less surface area for mold growth.
- Books that are actually submerged in water are likely to be in less danger than books that are wet but no longer submerged. After the initial wetting, submerged books will remain more stable and be less vulnerable to mold attack than wet materials exposed to air.
- Washing of mud and dirt from library materials should be carried out under the direction of the Conservation Unit. Skip the washing step if time or staff are short; the first priority is to remove the collection from further danger or from conditions that would promote mold growth.
- If time and staff permit, some mud and dirt can be removed from water-damaged materials as they are assembled for packing. Set up an area with a source of clean, running water, drainage, and a succession of non-rusting containers (such as plastic garbage cans) in which to rinse the material.

### **GUIDELINES FOR PACKING WET LIBRARY MATERIALS**

Be extremely careful when handling wet materials because they are very fragile. Don't unpack structurally sound containers (although they may be reinforced by packing inside plastic crates). Fill cartons and crates three-quarters full. Keep identification labels with objects. (Don't mark wet paper, but picture frames and reels can be marked with a grease pencil). To prevent further damage, do not stack materials in piles on the floor.

#### **PAPER**

Single sheets of paper: Do not try to separate but interleave the folders every two inches with freezer paper and pack.

Maps and manuscripts with soluble media: Do not blot the surface. Quickly freeze or dry.

Coated papers: Keep wet by packing in boxes lined with garbage bags, then freeze.

Framed prints and drawings: If time and space permit, unframe and pack as for single sheets.

Plans, oversize prints, manuscripts, maps in drawers: Sponge standing water out of map drawers.

Remove the drawers from the cabinet, ship and freeze them stacked up with 1" - 2" strips of wood between each drawer. Pack loose, flat maps in bread trays, flat boxes, or plywood sheets covered in polyethylene. Bundle rolled maps very loosely to go in small numbers to the freezer, unless facilities are available for conservators to unroll them.

## BOOKS

Don't open or close wet books or remove wet book covers. If the water is dirty wash the books before freezing. Do not wash open books and those with water soluble media. Wash closed books in tubs of cold running water and dab away (do not rub) mud with a sponge. Time and facilities may limit this treatment.

Lay a sheet of freezer paper around the cover, and pack spine down in a milk crate or cardboard carton.

Leather, parchment, and vellum bindings are an immediate priority because they distort and disintegrate in water. Books with coated papers should be kept wet by packing inside boxes lined with garbage bags, then frozen.

## PAINTINGS

Drain off excess water and take to a work area for immediate drying. Transport horizontally if you can. If not, carry the painting facing toward you, holding the side of the frame with the palms of your hands. Larger paintings should be carried by two people. The order of removal and treatment is: first, the most highly valued; second, the least damaged; third, slightly damaged and fourth, severely damaged.

## COMPUTER DISKS

If the diskettes are wet, pack them upright in containers of cold distilled water. Make arrangements to air dry.

## SOUND AND VIDEO RECORDINGS

Phonodiscs: If storage boxes are badly damaged, transfer the discs, up to five at a time, to milk crates. Pad the bottoms of the crates with ethafoam and interleave with ethafoam every 25 records to absorb shocks. Always transport the discs vertically and hold the discs by their edges.

Sound and video tapes: Pack vertically into egg crates or cardboard cartons. Do not put excessive weight on the sides of the reels or cassettes.

## PHOTOGRAPHIC MATERIALS

Salvage without delay these historic photographic processes:

- Wet collodion photographs (ambrotypes, tintypes, pannotypes and wet collodion glass negatives). Salvage first and air-dry these immediately. Both immersion and freezing will destroy the emulsion. If photographs cannot be handled immediately, place in sealed polyethylene bags and immerse in cold water until they can be air dried.
- Daguerreotypes: Salvage and air dry.
- Nitrates with softening emulsions: Freeze immediately and make arrangements to freeze dry. Emulsions are water soluble and could be lost. Other photographs should be kept in wet containers of fresh cold water until they are either air dried or frozen. If allowed to partially dry, they will stick together. Pack inside plastic garbage pails or garbage bags inside boxes. Keep to a minimum the immersion time prior to treatment or freezing.
- Prints, negatives, transparencies: Salvage color photographs first, then prints, then black and white negatives and transparencies.

- If facilities and personnel are available, air dry. Pack and freeze if not.
- Motion pictures: Open the film can, fill it with water, and replace the lid. Pack into plastic pails or cardboard cartons lined with garbage bags. Ship within 72 hours to a film processor for rewashing and drying.

## MICROFORMS

Roll Microfilm: It is often cheaper to replace microfilm than to salvage it. However, master negatives are often irreplaceable, demand salvage. Do not remove the films from their boxes. Hold cardboard boxes (and their labels) together with rubber bands. Fill the boxes with water then wrap 5 boxes of film into a block with plastic wrap. Pack the blocks into a heavy duty cardboard box lined with 3 garbage bags. Label as wet film and ship within 72 hours to a microfilm processor.

Diazo microfiche, aperture cards, film in jackets: Pack, freeze, and make arrangements to air dry.

Parchment and vellum: Separate from other documents, pack in crates or flat boxes, and freeze.

*(From Betty Walsh, Western Association for Art Conservation Newsletter, May 1988).*