

Saving Water Damaged Property

Salvage experts, property specialists and government agencies advise that quick action is critical when dealing with water-damaged property. Many types of personal property can be saved within 48 hours of being exposed to water.

Before trying to save property, make sure that YOU are safe. Flooded buildings can be hazardous. Make sure that there is no danger of electrocution by turning off power and avoiding fallen utility lines. Do not come in contact with water containing sewage and make sure the floor, ceiling and wall supports pose no danger.

Once determined that the loss site is safe, it's important to quickly contact the insurer. The insurance company should make it a priority to respond. It is important to get to a site to make an assessment of the damaged property and what items can be salvaged.

It is common that assessment is immediately followed or even accompanied by the work of restoration specialists who also are equipped to mitigate damage.

Be Practical and Prioritize

Often it is impractical or impossible to try to save everything, so prioritize. Make time spent on assessing damaged property will be more efficient by:

- Work on property that is MOST important to you and that is most vulnerable to permanent damage.
- Separate porous and non-porous property
- Separate high value and low value property
- Inventory and document property thoroughly and carefully
- Take many photographs at different angles
- Avoid throwing away any property until insurance company can inspect
- One practical consideration is to forget about fully upholstered furniture and mattresses. Such property is usually impossible to properly dry and is often contaminated.

Since quick action is imperative, the following are valuable tips on handling water damaged property.

Baskets—Rinse, drain and blot to remove excess water, stuff with clean paper towels or cotton sheets to retain shape and absorb stains, cover with clean towels and air dry slowly, regularly changing blotting material.

Books—If rinsing is necessary, hold book closed. If partially wet or damp, stand on top or bottom edge with covers opened to 90° angle; air dry. If very wet, lay flat on clean surface; interleave less than 20% of book with absorbent material; replace interleaving when damp.

CDs, DVDs—Remove from cases and bathe in clean distilled water, dry with lint-free towels and insert into new casing and copy.

Clothing/Fabrics—Brush off all loose, dried dirt. Rinse thoroughly in cold water as soon as possible until as much mud as possible is removed. Repeat if necessary. Do not use hot water as it sets stains from red or yellow clay. Machine wash when no more dirt can be rinsed out.

Leather (including shoes) and Rawhide—Rinse/sponge with clear water to remove mud, drain and blot to remove excess water, pad with toweling or unlinked paper to maintain shape, air dry. Manipulate tanned fur skins during drying to keep skins flexible.

Metal—Use gloves to handle, rinse/sponge and blot metal object, air dry. If object has applied finish, do not clean. Air dry; keep flaking surfaces horizontal.

Paintings—Remove from frames in a safe, dry place. Do NOT separate paintings from their stretchers. Keep paintings horizontal and paint-side up with nothing touching the surface. Avoid direct sunlight.

Paper—Air dry flat as individual sheets or in ¼" or smaller piles, with absorbent paper placed between each wet sheet (interleaving). Do not unfold or separate individual, wet sheets. Keep coated papers wet by packing in boxes lined with plastic garbage bags; freeze (maps or manuscripts), sponge water out; pack loose flat sheets in flat boxes or plywood covered with plastic sheets. If there are too many items for air drying, interleave (by groups or individually) with freezer or waxed paper; pack papers or files, standing up in sturdy containers; pack containers only 90% full and freeze.

Photographs—Remove from plastic/paper enclosures or frames; carefully rinse with cool, clean water; DO NOT touch or blot surfaces. Air dry, hang with clips on non-image areas, or lay flat on absorbent paper. Keep photographs from contact with adjacent surfaces or each other.

Rugs—To assist with drying and later, cleaning, it is helpful to squeeze out and vacuum as much moisture as possible. It is important to avoid contamination and development of mold. A great method for handling rugs is elevating property to facilitate draining and applying fans.

Upholstered Furniture—If antique or VERY valuable, get professional estimate on cleaning/restoring.

Wood Furniture—Rinse/sponge surfaces gently to clean, blot, and air dry slowly. If any painted surfaces are blistered or flaking, air dry slowly without removing dirt or moisture. Weigh down or clamp veneers in place while drying; separate weight from veneer with protective layer. (Finishes may develop white haze; treat later with wood cleaning product.)