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Tips for the Care of Water-Damaged Family Heirlooms and Other Valuables

AIC offers the following general recommendations for homeowners who have had family heirlooms and other valuables damaged by severe flooding. These recommendations are intended as guidance only and AIC does not assume responsibility or liability for treatment of water-damaged objects.

Ten Tips for the Homeowner

1. If the object is still wet, rinse with clear water or a fine hose spray. Clean off dry silt and debris from your belongings with soft brushes or dab with damp cloths. Try not to grind into objects; overly energetic cleaning will cause scratching. Dry with a clean, soft cloth. Use plastic or rubber gloves for your own protection.
2. Air dry objects indoors if possible. Sunlight and heat may dry certain materials too quickly, causing splits, warpage, and buckling. If possible, remove contents from wet objects and furniture prior to drying. Storing damp items in sealed plastic bags will cause mold to develop. If objects are to be transported in plastic bags, keep bags open and air circulating.
3. The best way to inhibit the growth of mold and mildew is to reduce humidity. Increase air flow with fans, open windows, air conditioners, and dehumidifiers. Moderate light exposure (open shades, leave basement lights on) can also reduce mold and mildew.
4. 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. Follow manufacturer's instructions, but avoid splattering or contact with objects and wallpapers as disinfectants may damage objects. Note: exposure to molds can have serious health consequences such as respiratory problems, skin and eye irritation, and infections. The use of protective gear, including a respirator with a particulate filter, disposable plastic gloves, goggles, or protective eyewear, and coveralls or a lab coat, is therefore essential.
5. 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 completely dry or, in the case of important materials, until you have consulted with a professional conservator.
6. 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 be treated by a professional conservator.
7. Textiles, leather, and other "organic" materials will also be severely affected by exposure to water and should be allowed to air dry. Shaped objects such as garments or baskets, should be supported by gently padding with toweling or unlinked, uncoated paper. Renew padding when it becomes saturated with water. Dry clean or launder textiles and carpets as you normally would.

8. Remove wet paintings from the frame, but not the stretcher. Air dry, face up, away from direct sunlight.
9. 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; consult a professional conservator for treatment.
10. Rinse metal objects exposed to flood 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. Consult a professional conservator for further treatment.

As noted above, these guidelines are general in nature. It is strongly recommended that a professional conservator be consulted as to the appropriate method of treatment for household objects. Professional conservators may be located on the [AIC website](http://www.aic.org) or by contacting the AIC office at (202) 452-9545 info@culturalheritage.org. Based on a complete description of the artifact, a computer-generated list of conservators will be compiled and grouped geographically, by specialization, and by type of service provided. Guidelines for Selecting a Conservator explain the guide, provide information on how to select a conservator, and outline general business procedures.