

Water-Damaged Paper Records

What do I do first?

The first thing you need to do is to evaluate the importance of the damaged records, and how badly they are affected. Read on for specific details of appropriate treatment.

My records have minor water damage. Is there anything I can do for them?

You can dry a limited number of records that have suffered minimal water damage using fans. (Do not try to dry using heat; it will only encourage mold growth.) Individual records that are not too heavily damaged can be hung from clotheslines; individual volumes can be stood up and fanned open so the fans can reach individual pages.

My records are badly damaged.

Are the damaged records of critical importance and unavailable elsewhere?

While it may be possible to salvage some flood-damaged records through freeze-drying, this service is expensive and difficult and should only be considered for irreplaceable records of very high legal, administrative, or information value. Records of high value may be considered for freeze-drying if their value, volume, and degree of damage are sufficient to warrant the expense. Freeze-drying stops mold or other deterioration and allows time to work with the vendor to plan a response in terms of what to do, in what order. State agencies should contact the Department of Buildings and General Services to determine what services are available to them.

What if the damaged records are duplicated elsewhere?

If there are secure back-up copies of records, whether digital, microform, or paper, and the back-ups are complete and accessible, damaged paper records should be treated as lower priority for salvage and may be disposed of safely.

My damaged records are covered by a records schedule and are up for destruction in two years. What do I do?

If you have record schedules indicating that some of your damaged records have relatively short retention times and are scheduled for destruction, you may treat these as low-priority items that may be disposed of safely when the retention requirement has been met.

What if the damage is just too bad?

Records are beyond restoration when the ink has run and the physical damage is so extensive that content is irretrievable. If records are not worth restoring or beyond restoration, take photographs, write up an inventory of the damaged records, and otherwise document these lost items, wherever possible.

I still have questions -- where do I go for more information?

Contact VSARA's Records and Information Management staff at rim@sec.state.vt.us or call 802-828-3700 and ask to speak with a records analyst.

The Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) is also a good resource that offers not only preservation information but also 24/7 Emergency Phone Assistance: <http://www.nedcc.org/disaster/disaster.php>