

Saving Your Personal Possessions

Practical Suggestions for Salvaging Water Damaged Artwork and Collectibles

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In the wake of a powerful storm or cyclone, our immediate thoughts and efforts must be directed toward those whose lives are at risk. But it is not too early to protect your personal possessions from further harm. As a leading insurer of fine homes and possessions, Chubb offers the following suggestions to help lessen the damage to your personal and often irreplaceable belongings.

First things first

- Early treatment is the best way to reduce damage. Contact a professional conservator for assistance as soon as possible.
- Find a secure area or room where you can store your valuables until they can be treated. This room should be dry and cool, with good air circulation. Ideally, the temperature should be about 18°C, with a relative humidity of 40% to 50%.
- Use slow box fans to keep the air moving and prevent mould growth.
- Open wire shelves permit air access to all sides, so do whatever you can with the materials you have at hand to simulate that environment. For example, old window screens placed on top of supports.

- Wet artifacts are highly vulnerable and can get damaged very easily. Work slowly and carefully, thinking out each step before handling any of your property.
- Take care of articles you consider most valuable first. Time is of the essence, and often delays will make a big difference in the chances of survival of an artifact.
- Deal with articles which suffered little or no damage and may be relatively easy to fix. Then proceed to increasingly damaged pieces. Deal with items in the worst condition last. Items in this group will need most of the work and resources and have the least likelihood of total restoration.

Paintings

- Dry with air only as quickly as possible.
- Don't touch, blot or wipe the surface.
- Keep the painting in the frame if possible.
- Maintain the painting face up in a horizontal position, especially if you notice flaking.
- Transport with minimum vibration or shock to prevent any losses of detached paint film.
- Do not stack anything on top of a painting as the canvas may stretch or tear.

- Do not allow anything to poke into the painting from below.
- Never lay a painting face down or attempt to press down lifted paint.
- Don't touch the surface even after the painting is completely dry.

Framed prints, watercolors, drawings, documents, works on paper, etc.

- Remove artwork from the frame and damp mats.
- Place paper towels or plain newsprint between the individual works.
- Change paper layers frequently and allow artwork to air dry flat.

Stacks of ledger sheets, manuscripts, loose papers, etc.

- Spread out pages on absorbent paper towels or newsprint to absorb excess moisture.
- Stack with a dry paper towel between every five to ten sheets and store flat.
- Keep replacing paper towels as needed and flip stacks over each time you do.
- Consider a freeze-drying service to stop the water deterioration of valuable papers, books or manuscripts.

Books

- Stand damp books with their spine facing up, supported by their covers slightly apart and pages fanned and hanging.
- Fan the pages every few hours.
- When mostly dry, lay books down and make a stack with cooking paper separating each page and weigh down, so the books can dry flat.
- Soft cover books may be handled like manuscripts above.
- Books printed on coated papers with pages already stuck together have very little chance of salvage. If you can separate the pages, insert wax paper sheets between each page and fan frequently until dry.
- Books with leather bindings and rare books
- Isolate covers from text pages by inserting a sheet of plastic between them. Put paper towels or newsprint between pages, changing frequently.

- Don't try to force the book shut because you will damage the binding.
- If books were stacked or compressed when water damaged, keep them stacked or compressed if they are to be freeze-dried.

Photographs

- Remove photos from frames immediately while still wet. If already stuck to the glass, let them dry, and don't try to remove the photo.
- Do not wipe or try to blot photos as the emulsion will be damaged.
- If photos were damaged by dirty water, rinse them gently with clean cold water in a tub or the sink.
- Place photos on paper towels face up and allow to air dry.
- Do not stack photographs.
- Remove photos from albums if possible and dry as above.
- For a formal wedding album with bound, double sided pages, place wax paper between each page and alternately expose each page to the air until the album is mostly dry. Next, close the album, apply weight, and allow to dry completely. Make sure the pictures are NOT touching each other or else they will stick together and ruin the album.

Negatives

- Take care of prints before negatives.
- If negatives are wet and dirty, rinse them in cold water but be careful not to touch the emulsion side.
- When clean, place them on dry paper towels with their emulsion side up.
- Do not stack, since they will stick together and become unsalvageable
- Medical x-rays can be rinsed in cold water and air dried face up on a paper towel.

Movie film or microfilm

- If the film is wet, fill the film can with cold water or put film in a zip-lock bag with cold water. Take the film to a film processor for washing and drying.

Frames

- Preserve all broken fragments or ornaments.
- Move frames by handling them from their underside only.
- Do not wipe or touch the surface, or any softened ornament.
- Keep the frame face up and allow to air dry.

The range of damaged artifacts is broad and each item is unique. These suggestions should be considered only as means of temporary salvage and not as a substitute for item-specific advice from a professional conservator.

About Chubb in Australia

Chubb is the world's largest publicly traded property and casualty insurer. Chubb, via acquisitions by its predecessor companies, has been present in Australia for over 50 years. Its operation in Australia (Chubb Insurance Australia Limited) provides specialised and customised coverages include Marine, Property, Liability, Energy, Professional Indemnity, Directors & Officers, Financial Lines, Utilities as well as Accident & Health, for a broad client base, including many of the country's largest companies.

More information can be found at www.chubb.com/au

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