

# Salvage Flood-Damaged Photos

It is possible to restore many flood-damaged photos, but first they have to be properly dried and stored. Follow the tips below for the best chance of preserving your pictures.

## 1. Separate Photos

Carefully lift the photos from the mud and dirty water. Remove photos from waterlogged albums and separate any that are stacked together, being careful not to rub or touch the wet emulsion of the photo surface. Remove photos from plastic sleeves that you see in albums right away if possible.

## 2. Blot and Dry Photos

If you have time and space right away, lay each wet photo face up on any clean blotting paper, such as a paper towel. Don't use newspapers or printed paper towels, as the ink may transfer to your wet photos. Change the blotting paper every hour or two until the photos dry. Try to dry the photos inside if possible, as sun and wind will cause photos to curl more quickly.

## 3. Soak to Remove Debris

When the photo is dry, you can begin to clean it by testing a corner of the with wet Q-tip to see if the emulsion is stable enough to let you soak the photo. If the photo is stable you can remove mud/dirt by gently soaking both sides of the photo in a bucket or sink of clear, cold water. Don't rub the photos and be sure to change the water frequently.

## 4. Store Photos

If you don't have time right away to dry your damaged photos, soak them to remove mud and debris. Carefully stack the wet photos between sheets of wax paper and seal them in a Ziploc-type plastic bag. If possible, freeze the photos to inhibit damage. This way photos can be defrosted, separated and air-dried later when you have the time to do it properly.

## More Tips for Handling Damaged Photographs

- Try to get to flood-damaged photos within two days or they will begin to mold or stick together, making saving them much more unlikely.
- Begin with photographs for which there are no negatives, or for which the negatives are also water damaged.
- Photos in frames need to be saved when they are still soaking wet, otherwise the photo surface will stick to the glass as it dries and you will not be able to separate them without damaging the photo emulsion. To remove a wet photo from a picture frame, keep the glass and photo together. Holding both, rinse with clear flowing water, using the water stream to gently separate the photo from the glass.
- Some historical photographs are very sensitive to water damage and may not be recoverable. Older photographs should also not be frozen without first consulting a professional conservator. You may also want to send any damaged heirloom photos to a professional photo restorer after drying.

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## OPERATION PHOTO RESCUE

<http://www.operationphotorescue.org>

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