

Caring for Important Papers after a Flood

*Extension Family Development and Resource Management Specialists
The Texas A&M University System*

If your important papers have been damaged by flooding or rainwater, you might be able to save them by following these instructions:

- ◆ For best results, dry papers and books slowly.
- ◆ If you don't have time to clean and dry your books and papers immediately, put each book or paper in a sealed plastic bag in the freezer to prevent mildew. Place wax paper between the layers of paper bundles or books so they can be separated easily when removed.
- ◆ Wipe book covers with a solution of one part rubbing or denatured alcohol and one part water.
- ◆ Place the books on end with the leaves separated. When they are partially dry, pile and press the books to keep the pages from crumpling. Alternate drying and pressing the books until they are thoroughly dry. This helps prevent mildew. In this step, you can use a fan to dry them faster.
- ◆ If papers and books are very damp, sprinkle the pages with cornstarch or talcum powder to absorb moisture. Leave the powder there for several hours, then brush it off.
- ◆ For valuable books that are nearly dry, consider pressing the pages with an electric iron set on low. Although this is a tedious process, it may be worth the effort. Separate the pages to prevent musty odors.
- ◆ When the books are thoroughly dry, close them and use C-clamps to help them retain their shape. Wipe vinyl and leather book covers with a light coating of petroleum jelly or leather or vinyl dressing.

Even if your papers appear to have dried successfully, they may disintegrate rapidly because of substances that were in the floodwater or rainwater.

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