

## 2. Salvage of Specific Materials

### 2.3 Photographic Materials

How to dry photographs, slides, negatives, film and photo albums

#### SUMMARY

##### IN A NUTSHELL:

- Remove from sleeves, envelopes, albums and frames.
- Rinse as necessary.
- Air dry or freeze dry.

##### SALVAGE PRIORITIES:

- Prints before negatives and slides
- Older photographs before more modern ones
- Of the modern photos, coloured prints before black & white

##### WHAT TO EXPECT:

- Photographs might not look perfect after drying, eg. curled, but they can often be improved through conservation treatment.
- If photographs are left to dry in a pile, they will stick together.

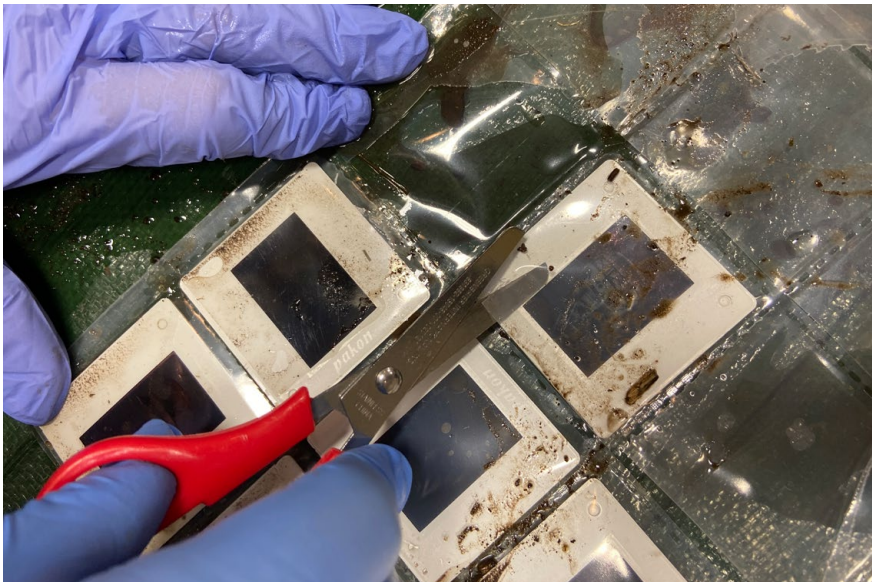
#### STEP 1

##### Remove photos from plastic or paper sleeves, albums and frames

- Keep any written information that is on the plastic or paper, in albums or on the back of the frames that is important.

##### ► Plastic or paper protectors

- Do not try to pull items out of protectors as this can cause damage. Instead, cut plastic or paper and carefully peel it away from the photo.



Cutting slides out of plastic protectors

##### ► Albums

- Move loose or easily removed photos to the drying area. The album itself might be important, keep track of the order of the photos for future reference.



##### Caution

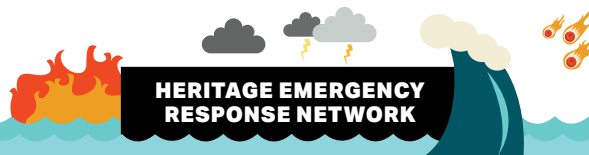
*Avoid touching the front of photographic material because it is very fragile when damp or wet. Handle by the edges and do not blot.*



##### Caution



*Do not take apart cased photographs (e.g. daguerreotypes and ambrotypes). Open the case like a book, set it on edge and air dry.*



- If photos are stuck, if pages have writing on them or if you don't want to take the photographs out, follow procedures for drying books. *See Sheet 2.2 Books, Pamphlets and Magazines.*
- Very wet and fragile albums can be bagged and frozen. Consult a conservator for further guidance.

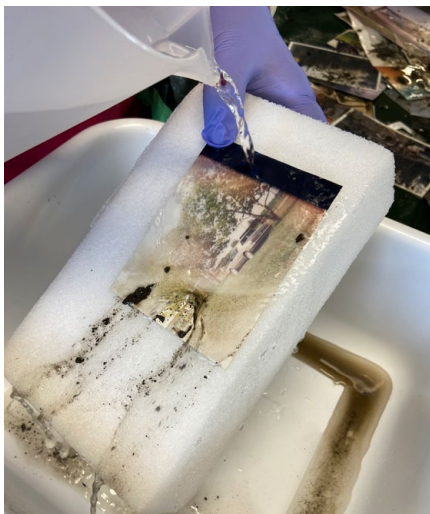
### ► Framed photographs

- Take photographs out of frames and move them to the drying area. Keep the frame materials if they are important.
- Photographs that are already stuck to glass will not come off without damage, so to prevent mould, air dry them face down.

## STEP 2

### Rinse photographs, slides and negatives that are dirty or contaminated (seawater, sewage)

- Place the item on a flat tray or hard surface, hold it by the edge in a non-image area and rinse with water, or gently swish it around in a bath of clear water.



Rinsing dirt from photographs with a stream of water



Rinsing photographs in a bath of clean water

- Gently shake or tip to drain any excess water from the surface, then move it to the drying area. Do not blot or touch the surface.

## STEP 3

### Freeze as necessary and as appropriate

- Most photographic materials are freezer friendly. Avoid freezing photographs in cases (e.g. ambrotypes, daguerreotypes), on metal (tintypes), glass plate negatives, and instant photographs (Polaroids).
- Freeze photos or albums until the crisis is over if you have too many items to salvage at this time. *See Sheet 3.5 How to Freeze Materials.*
- Rinse them if they are dirty or contaminated (seawater, sewage), make stacks up to 2–4 cm and separate the stacks with wax paper, and seal in plastic bags. Get the bagged photographic materials into a freezer as soon as possible or within 24 hours.



#### Tip

*Most photographic materials can survive being left in clean water for 48 hours while you work on other things but try to minimize the time in water as possible.*



#### Caution

*Photographs, slides, and negatives will react badly to salt. If items are wet with salt water (e.g. a tsunami) they must be rinsed in fresh water.*



#### Tip



*Slides in viewing carousels can be rinsed and air dried without removing them from the carousel.*



#### Tip

#### FREEZER FRIENDLY!

*Most photographic materials can be frozen to prevent mould growth.*



## STEP 4

### Dry photographic materials

- Separate wet photographs to prevent them from sticking together. If photographs are stuck together, keep them wet in a plastic bag and freeze or consult a conservator. Never force stuck items apart.
- Air dry photographs on a surface covered with towel, newsprint or other absorbent materials. Spread the items face up in a single layer with no overlapping edges, on a table covered with towel, newsprint or other absorbent materials.

### ! Caution

*Photographs can stick together as they dry, especially color photographs. Spread them out and air dry in a single layer.*



Photographs spread out in a single layer to dry

- Strong photographic materials can be hung to dry on a clothesline to air dry. Use clothespins or clips to secure photographs and negatives at the edges in a non-images area and on the frame of the slide. Fold a small piece of paper and place it between the photo and the clip.



Photographs secured at the edge and hanging to dry

## STEP 5

### Monitor the drying process

- Speed up drying by regularly replacing wet absorbent material beneath and between the photos, slides and negatives.
- As time and resources allow, reposition loose photos to make sure they are not sticking together and rearrange albums to make sure they are drying overall.
- Regularly check and take action if you see signs of mould. *See Sheet 3.3 Mould.*
- Keep air moving in the drying areas by opening windows or using fans, being careful not to blow directly at the photographs.
- Use dehumidifiers to help dry out the air in your workspaces.
- Once items are dry, move them to a safe, dry space.

## STEP 6

### Organize salvaged photographic materials and tidy workspaces

- Organize the dry photos, slides, negatives, and albums as appropriate.
- Complete documentation for your institution and for your insurance provider.
- Confirm what can be discarded.
- Depending on the situation, you may need to label and pack items for temporary storage or for conservation treatment.
- Reassemble whatever components you are keeping, e.g frames.
- Move salvaged photographic materials to permanent or temporary storage locations.
- Clean work areas and replenish supplies.

CONGRATULATIONS! This marks the end of the emergency for these items – they are now safe.

## STEP 7

### Tie up loose ends

Identify and manage any outstanding priorities or remaining issues such as:

- Deal with mouldy photographs, slides, negatives, albums that have been bagged and frozen. *See Sheet 3.3 Mould.*
- Frozen items can be thawed in manageable amounts as time permits. They are then dried as described above.
- Further treatment steps such as flattening, cleaning, and repairing can be scheduled.
- Contact a conservator for specific guidance and advice if needed.



Tip

#### WHEN IS IT DRY?

*Photographs are dry when the back no longer feels cool when touched with the back of your hand. Slides or negatives are dry when the surfaces are smooth.*

