

2. Salvage of Specific Materials

2.5 Textiles and Fabrics

How to dry blankets, weavings and clothing, made from either natural or synthetic fibre, woven and non-woven

SUMMARY

IN A NUTSHELL:

- Rinse as necessary.
- Pad out shaped items.
- Air dry, fast dry, or freeze.

SALVAGE PRIORITIES:

- Items with bleeding colours
- Thick, slow drying items

WHAT TO EXPECT:

- Large, flat textiles need a lot of space for drying.
- Textiles might not look perfect after drying, but they can often be improved through conservation treatment.

STEP 1

Rinse textiles that are dirty or contaminated (e.g. seawater, sewage)

- Check for loose parts, breaks or tears. Take extra care with these areas.
- To clean an entire textile, rinse it in water. Begin by filling bins with clean, cool water. Several bins of water will allow for successive rinses. Place the textile on a sheet or screen or other support to act as a sling and submerge it in the first bin of water. Remove the sling and swish the textile around. When most dirt is removed, re-insert the support and transfer it to the next bin of water for additional rinsing or to a blotting area.



Rinsing in multiple bins using a screen sling for support



Caution

Textiles are susceptible to mould growth. Clean and dry within 48 hours or pack and freeze to buy time.



Caution

Textiles with running colours should be kept separate from other items when wet to prevent colour transfer.



Tip

Roll or fold large textiles to make them easier to lift and move.



Tip

Save any detached pieces and note where they came from.



Caution

Wet textiles can be very heavy. Additional support may be required to prevent tearing and stretching.

- To spot clean textiles that are not fully wet or if the dirt is in a select area, place the textile on a rigid support and gently pour water over it or use a sprayer or hose to release loose dirt until water running out of the fabric is clean. Use a soft brush to nudge dirt away.



Cleaning partially wet textile with stream of water

STEP 2

Remove excess water

- Avoid rubbing surfaces or wringing out textiles as this may cause damage or distortion.
- Gently press absorbent paper or towel on surfaces to remove as much water as possible. Check after each press to be sure that paint or other surface decoration is not being removed. If it is, stop pressing.
- If colours run, continue to remove as much excess water as possible and dry the textile quickly. *See Sheet 3.1 Drying Tunnel.*

STEP 3

Freeze as necessary and as appropriate

- Textiles are freezer friendly.
- Freeze textiles until the crisis is over, if you have too many items to salvage at this time or if the colour is running. *See Sheet 4.4.4 How to Freeze Materials.*
- Rinse if they are dirty or contaminated (seawater, sewage), separate and place individual textiles in plastic bags. Remove the air and tie or seal the bag closed and apply labels. Get the bagged textiles into a freezer as soon as possible or within 24 hours.



Tip

Washing dirty and wet textiles can reduce stains that set as they dry.



Tip

Window screening makes a very good sling support during washing, rinsing and transporting because it is strong and allows for drainage.



Tip

Folded or crumpled textiles can be rinsed before being fully opened.



Tip

The running of colors can be slowed or stopped by blotting and fast drying.



Tip

FREEZER FRIENDLY!

Textiles can be frozen to reduce the risk of running colours and to prevent mould growth.

STEP 4

Dry textiles and fabrics

- Flat textiles may be air dried. Lay the textile on a surface covered with towel or other absorbent materials.
- Thick or stuffed textiles such as rugs, pillows, and dolls may require fast drying to prevent mould growth. *See Sheet 3.3 Mould.*
- Stuff out shapes, folds, pockets etc. with crumpled paper towel or other absorbent materials to increase air flow and to support shape while drying.



Bag stuffed with paper towel and raised on foam blocks to speed drying

- To increase air flow while drying, textiles can be raised up.
- Strong textiles can be hung to dry.



A large flat textile draped over a rail to dry

- If colours run, freeze as above or dry the textile quickly by using fans or placing in a drying tunnel. *See Sheet 3.1 Drying Tunnel.*

Caution

Other materials attached to textiles, such as metal or wood, can cause staining. Consider wrapping dangling attachments with paper towel to reduce the chance of staining.

STEP 5

Monitor the drying process

- Speed up drying by regularly changing wet padding, and adjusting shape as needed.
- 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.
- Use dehumidifiers to help dry out the air in your workspaces.
- Once items are dry, remove the padding and move them to a safe, dry space.

STEP 6

Organize salvaged textiles and tidy workspaces

- 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.
- Move salvaged textiles and fabrics 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 textiles that have been bagged and frozen. *See Sheet 3.3 Mould.*
- Textiles that have been frozen due to running colors should be sent to a conservator while frozen.
- Other frozen items can be thawed in manageable amounts as time permits. They are then dried as previously described.
- Further treatment steps such as cleaning, reshaping and repairing can be scheduled. Contact a conservator for specific guidance and advice if needed.

