



## **Sri Lanka National Archives**

### **Guidelines for preserving wet records**

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**For whom: Public authorities**

**PRIORITY RECORDS:** Land registries, court records, vital records (births, deaths, marriages), financial records, personnel files, and records with legal or evidential value.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Your salvage strategy (freezing or air drying) will depend on the extent of the damage to your records. If you have more damaged records than you can air-dry within the next 48 hours with available staff, you will have to focus all effort on moving records to freezing facilities immediately.

#### **1. BEFORE YOU ENTER PREMISES**

- Contact the Sri Lanka National Archives and obtain contact details of your coordinating officer
- Study these guidelines (verify that you are using the latest version)
- Ensure that it is safe to enter premises and begin recovery **IMMEDIATELY**. If recovery actions are delayed more than 48-72 hours, mould begins to form and recovery becomes a major undertaking.
- Recognise that initial response to water disaster can be stressful, and requires careful but swift planning.

#### **2. ENTERING YOUR RECORD ROOM**

- Enter all record rooms with an authorised staff member.
- Take photographs to document situation in rooms.
- Carefully separate materials by wetness level: slightly wet, wet, soaking wet and dry. Also separate records where ink has run or bled.
- The order of your records may change, but maintain unique identification numbers of files at all times.
- Assess the extent of the damage (i.e. number of files). (Your salvage strategy - freezing or air-drying - will depend on the extent of damage.)

#### **3. REQUIRED FACILITIES**

- Freezing facilities (cold rooms). If you are dealing with large quantities of wet records, freezing the soaked records buys you time.

- A clean, safe and secure drying room you can close with A/C and humidity control or good ventilation and with electricity to plug in fans.
- If you have A/C, the temperature should not be more than 18C and the relative humidity should be as low as possible (at the least, below 60 per cent) and fans should keep the air circulating.
- You need spaces large enough to keep damaged records to be air-dried for drying.
- A lot of tables, preferably plastic table tops.
- If possible, the room should have a floor that can handle water.

#### **4. ITEMS YOU MAY NEED**

- Crates / boxes (ideally plastic)
- Lots of towels, preferably white or washed many times (ask hotels for old laundry)
- Other absorbent materials like paper towels, paper, roneo sheets, half sheets, blotting paper, unprinted newsprint.
- Oil paper
- Portable electric fans
- Dehumidifiers and/or silica gel
- Assorted sizes of polythene bags (for packing items), if possible ziplock bags
- Cellotape to seal polythene bags
- Sponges
- Clipboard, camera, notebooks and pens
- Gloves
- Masks
- Scissors (for cutting absorbent paper or polythene to size)
- Clean water
- Bins
- Plastic to support records while holding them

#### **5. MOVING FILES**

- Files that have fallen from shelves must be moved first
- Use crates / boxes (ideally with holes) to shift records to new location
- Pack records flat or spine down in a single row and layer.
- Pack snugly but not too tightly.
- Record the contents of each box as packed. Always document box number; number of records in the box; original location; unique identification number; slightly wet, wet, soaking wet, dry, soluble ink when moving.
- Move packed items to a freezer or room identified for air drying immediately.

#### **6. FREEZING WET RECORDS**

- In mass-scale disasters, freezing may be the only viable option for salvage.
- Place records in sealable polythene bags. Separate volumes inside packets with polythene, oil or blotting paper.
- Place in freezing conditions below 0°C. It should be possible to freeze the items in about three hours.
- The freezer should be lockable, and monitoring the conditions inside should be possible from outside.

- Keeping the records cool will stabilize them and will also inhibit mould/fungus growth.
- When you are ready, you can take them out in batches from the freezer to air dry them.
- Do not freeze audio tapes, video tapes, computer tapes, CDs, DVD etc.
- **If items are placed in a freezer soon after becoming wet, they will become less distorted than air-dried materials.**

## **7. CLEANING WET RECORDS**

- Ensure that the process of cleaning wet records is carefully supervised.
- If files have debris (rust, mud or salt water), check if the ink is soluble.
- **If the ink is soluble, you cannot rinse the records.**
- If the ink is soluble, lightly wipe the mud away as possible and wrap them in polythene, leaving debris on the item if unavoidable.
- If the ink is not soluble and if the record is very muddy/dirty, rinse before freezing or air-drying.
- Set up three or four bins of clean water for rinsing.
- Hold books tightly closed and dip gently in the water.
- Move each item carefully from bin to bin.
- Switch the last two bins for the first two, replacing the dirtiest water (in the first two bins) with clean water. Make these the bins for final rinses.
- If records are fully covered in mud, rinse them by placing them on a piece of plastic or other support.

## **8. AIR-DRYING RECORDS**

- Air-drying of records is suitable for small numbers of records that are slightly wet or wet.
- Recognise that air-drying is labour intensive, even if very special equipment is not necessary.
- First, cover all records with polythene to lock in the dampness. Then rapidly start drawing out the water by interleaving absorbent material that is changed when wet.
- **If the records dry before you are able to remove the water from them through interleaving, the records will become distorted.**
- If you can control humidity in the drying room, reduce the relative humidity as low as possible to prevent mould and improve drying capabilities.
- If humidity in the room is not controlled by machines, place silica gel packets of 25 g for one cubic metre.
- Switch on fans and aim airflow parallel to the drying records. Do not point fans directly at the records at close range.
- Pages of bound volumes or files should be laid on towels and interleaved with absorbant materials like paper towels, paper, roneo sheets, half sheets, blotting paper or unprinted newsprint.
- For coated paper or papers with soluble ink or colours that could bleed, use oil paper for interleaving.
- Single leaves can be laid out on tables and other flat surfaces protected by absorbent materials.

- When air-drying frozen records, thaw out small groups of records at a time. A small group will be one that you can finish air drying within a day.
- If you are unable to finish the work in a day, the items can go back in the freezer until time is available.
- For further instructions on how to air-dry frozen records, contact the National Archives.

## **9. KEY CONSIDERATIONS**

- Time is of essence as mould can build up very quickly.
- Always take pictures as you move along.
- No drying method can restore the records to their original condition. However, if recovery occurs quickly through maintaining stable conditions, the material can often be dried and saved with little visible damage. Dried records can be stored in suitable steel racks, acid-free boxes, and in suitable climate conditions.
- Note that dried records will always occupy more space than ones that have never been water damaged.
- It may be necessary to carry out thymol fumigation to control fungus growth.