

How to Save Flood or Water Damaged Photos

By Mark Madere – www.spectralight.com/copyrest

When floods and fires hit, most people don't grieve losing a stove or couch. It's the loss of valued family photos, scrapbooks and memorabilia that makes them cry. When facing piles of soggy, mud-spattered photos and other valuables - saving them may be possible by using some of the tips that follow.

Saving Water-Damaged Photos

Most photos, negatives and color slides can be cleaned and air-dried using the following steps:

1. Carefully lift the photos from the mud or dirty water. Remove photos from soaked albums and separate any that are stuck together. Be careful not to rub or touch the wet photo surface.
2. Gently rinse both sides of the photo in a sink filled with clear, cold water. Again, don't wipe the photos and be sure to change the water often.
3. If you have time and space, immediately lay each wet photo – picture side up - on clean blotting paper like a paper towel. Don't use newspapers or printed paper towels because the ink may transfer to your wet photos. Change the blotting paper every hour or two until the photos dry. It is best to dry the photos indoors if possible because wind and sun will cause photos to curl more quickly.
4. If you can't dry your photos immediately, just rinse them to remove any mud and debris. Carefully stack the wet photos between sheets of wax paper and seal them in a resealable plastic bag. If possible, freeze the photos to restrain damage. Then later, photos can be thawed, separated and air-dried when you have the time to do it correctly.

Additional Tips

1. Try to start saving flood-damaged photos within two days or they will begin to mold or stick together, making saving them much more unlikely.
2. Begin with photos for which there are no negatives or the negatives are also water damaged.
3. Photos in frames are best saved while they are still wet. Otherwise, the photo surface will stick to the glass as it dries. Then, you won't be able to separate them from the glass without damaging the photo surface. To remove a wet photo from a picture frame, keep the glass and photo together. Rinse both under clear, flowing water using the water stream to gently separate the photo from the glass.
4. It is important to note that some historical photographs are very sensitive to water damage and may not be recoverable. Older photographs should 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.

When All Else Fails

If your photos are water damaged, there is hope! SpectraLight Photography & Design has a long history of success copying and digitally restoring faded, water-stained and cracked photos. See samples at: www.spectralight.com/copyrest

Call them at 440-748-6300 or e-mail mark@spectralight.com