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WHEN THE DUST SETTLES: TIPS FOR SAFELY CLEANING FAMILY TREASURES

Washington, DC – September 17, 2001. When people return to their homes and offices in lower Manhattan and other affected areas, they may find fragile family treasures covered with dust. The National Task Force on Emergency Response, an initiative of Heritage Preservation and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, offers a few tips on cleaning. These guidelines are based on the experience and wisdom of the respected conservation professionals who care for our nation's treasures in museums and libraries.

The dust from debris and ash is granular and may scratch delicate surfaces if you try to wipe it away with a rag. The most important thing to remember – no dust cloth. Use a vacuum cleaner or a gentle brush. Soot is also granular *and* greasy. If the dust and dirt cannot be removed by vacuuming, try a special product known as a soot sponge. Here are general guidelines for treasured objects:

Books, Upholstery, Baskets, Delicate Fabrics and Teddy Bears: Vacuum on *low* suction, with the nozzle covered by cheesecloth and secured with a rubber band. This prevents tearing or pulling away loose bits of paper or fabric. Vacuum fabrics by gently patting the surface as if you were blotting it.

Photographs, Papers: Place on a clean blotter. Brush lightly with a clean, dry, soft brush from the center of the photo or paper outward toward the edges.

Furniture: Vacuum with a brush attachment. Don't use polishes or oils.

Ceramics, Silver, Ivory, Stone: For purely decorative objects, dust carefully with a brush with soft bristles, or use a gentle vacuum with a brush attachment. Handle one object at a time with clean, dry hands. If the piece is used for serving food, wash it with mild detergent and dry thoroughly.

Clocks: Most antique clocks should be cleaned on the outside only by gentle dusting with a clean brush. Take your heirloom timepiece to a trained professional for cleaning if it is covered with dust and soot.

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Dolls: Try first to remove the dirt with a soft, dry brush. If necessary, you can use a cotton swab lightly dampened with water on ceramic or plastic dolls, and then pat dry. Do not use solvents.

Supplies. You may have many of these items around the house. Soot sponges can be obtained through specialty cleaning companies. Hardware and art supply stores should have almost everything else.

- As with any disaster, there may be health risks in the environment. Please follow recommended safety precautions, which may include surgical masks and gloves.
- A hand-held, suction-only vacuum cleaner or canister machine with nozzle attachments and variable speeds. Just remember that the exhaust port will blow out the dust. A vacuum cleaner fitted with a HEPA filter is the best choice.
- Clean blotter paper, cheesecloth and rubber bands.
- A selection of artists' brushes – with soft, light-colored bristles – in different sizes. Ideally the brushes should have no metal parts, which can snag. However, you can cover any metal parts with cloth adhesive tape. Clean and thoroughly dry the brushes as they become soiled.
- A soot sponge is never used with liquid. Follow instructions – dab, don't rub.

The National Task Force on Emergency Response is a partnership of 30 government agencies and national service organizations. It was formed in 1995 to help libraries and archives, museums, historical societies, and historic sites better protect their cultural and historic resources from damage. The Task Force provides expert information on response and salvage to cultural institutions and the public.

These guidelines are based on the text of *Caring for Your Family Treasures* (Abrams, New York, 2000), a book produced by the national nonprofit, Heritage Preservation, with the advice of top conservators. The guidelines are general in nature. Internet links to additional information on disaster recovery and professional conservation advice are available through the Heritage Preservation Web site (www.heritagepreservation.org). Always consult a professional conservator for treatment of your most valuable objects. The American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works has a free referral service (202-452-9545), and the Regional Alliance for Preservation (800-843-8482) has information on preservation services.

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