

An Initiative of
Federal Emergency
Management Agency
Heritage Preservation
and

Advisory Council on Historic
Preservation

American Association
of Museums

American Association for State
and Local History

American Institute of Architects

American Institute for
Conservation of Historic and
Artistic Works

American Library Association

Association of African American
Museums

Association of Art Museum
Directors

Association for Preservation
Technology International

Association of Regional
Conservation Centers

Council on Library and
Information Resources

Council of State Archivists

Department of the Army

General Services Administration,
Public Buildings Service

The Getty Conservation Institute

Institute of Museum and Library
Services

International Association of
Emergency Managers

Library of Congress

National Archives and Records
Administration

National Association of
Government Archives and
Records Administrators

National Association of Tribal
Historic Preservation Officers

National Conference of State
Historic Preservation Officers

National Emergency
Management Association

National Endowment for the Arts

National Endowment for the
Humanities

National Historical Publications
and Records Commission

National Park Service

National Science Foundation

National Trust for Historic
Preservation

Regional Alliance for
Preservation

Small Business Administration

Smithsonian Institution

Society of American Archivists

Society of Architectural
Historians

The Society for Historical
Archaeology

Society for the Preservation of
Natural History Collections

US/International Council on
Monuments and Sites

World Monuments Fund

Save Family Treasures from Soot

Conservation experts say prompt, gentle attention is best



Removing soot and ash from cherished family heirlooms requires prompt and gentle attention to avoid further damage. The Heritage Emergency National Task Force, a coalition of 40 national organizations and federal agencies including FEMA, offers the following tips for cleaning up. The advice is based on the experience of respected conservation professionals who care for our nation's treasures in museums and libraries.

- ✓ **Safety first!** Avoid skin or lung irritation. Wear plastic or rubber gloves, an N95 mask, and goggles during cleanup.
- ✓ **Get started promptly.** The longer soot or ash sits on a surface, the more damage it does.
- ✓ **Handle objects as little as possible.** If you must move them, use a tray or hanger, and grasp them in places that are normally hidden from view.
- ✓ **If soot and ash are wet**—say, from fire hose water or a burst pipe—don't do anything to remove them; attempting to remove them from wet surfaces will cause further damage. Get advice from a professional.
- ✓ **Likewise, do not rinse sooty or ash-covered treasures.**
- ✓ **Resist the urge to wipe soot and ash-covered surfaces with a clean cloth;** wiping will embed the soot and ash in the object and make it much more difficult to recover.
- ✓ **Instead, remove soot and ash with a vacuum on the lowest setting.** Do not let the nozzle touch the object and do not use a brush attachment; let the wand float over the surface.
- ✓ **When cleaning textiles, do not unfold them—this will only disperse the soot.**
- ✓ **After vacuuming, you may need to clean the object with a soot sponge,** which can be purchased at major hardware stores. Unlike other sponges, use this one dry. Lay the sponge on the surface, press gently, and lift without rubbing. Cut off sections as they become dirty.
- ✓ **Call in a pro.** If a valuable family treasure is badly damaged, a professional conservator may be able to help. The American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works has a free referral service (202-452 9545 or <http://aic.stanford.edu>), and the Regional Alliance for Preservation (800-843-8482 or www.preservcollections.org) has information on preservation services.

These general guidelines are adapted from the *Field Guide to Emergency Response* produced by the national nonprofit Heritage Preservation.

A six-minute *Field Guide to Emergency Response* video clip on salvaging objects and family treasures from soot and ash damage and additional information is available at www.heritagepreservation.org.

These recommendations are intended as guidance only. Neither the Heritage Emergency National Task Force nor its sponsors, Heritage Preservation and FEMA, assume responsibility or liability for treatment of damaged objects.