

*The information provided below was originally prepared by Jean Barr, Records Manager, Sidley & Austin for the 1993 ALA Annual Conference presentation, "Disaster Preparedness". It was forwarded to Suzanne Rose, Management Consultant for TNBAR Management Services, by the Florida State Bar in the hope of being able to assist Tennessee attorneys in the recovery of their documents.*

- Initial Response
  - Once it is determined that disaster is over and space is accessible, begin assessing damage. Make sure all file cabinets or other containers that are to be opened are cold to the touch. If fire was involved, flash fires may occur upon opening a warm cabinet.
  - Call vendors and collect the following supplies:
    - Freezer or waxed paper
    - New boxes, file pockets and folders
    - Plastic milk containers
    - Refrigerated facilities or trucks
    - Plastic garbage cans or pails
    - Sawhorses, plywood and plastic sheeting to wrap wet records for removal
    - Fans and dehumidifiers; pumps, if necessary
    - Mops, buckets, sponges and rubber gloves
    - Hand-held, two-way radios (walkie talkies) or cellular phones
    - Irons, plastic clips and clothesline or nylon fish line if working with a small volume of records
  
- Assessment Procedures
  - Prioritize damaged documents to be restored in order to protect the most critical documents from further damage. Separate those records that are of critical importance from those that can wait.
  - Determine whether to freeze some of the documents in the hope that they will never need to be restored. It is less expensive to freeze documents than it is to freeze them and restore them. If back-up records are available, the originals should not be restored.
  - Identify the status of materials by the use of colored tape or markers.
    - Black – beyond hope and cannot be recovered
    - Red – to be recovered first and of the greatest importance
    - Yellow – to be frozen and recovered only when needed. Long term storage is possible.
    - Green – does not need any recovery service, not damaged and can be used immediately
  
- Documentation
  - Destruction of any material should be documented for legal and insurance purposes. Use a disposal certificate to indicate what is beyond recovery and why. Form should contain following information:
    - Client/Matter No. or Record Title
    - No. of file in pockets

- Inclusive dates
  - Reason destroyed
  - The form should be signed and dated.
- Records Storage Areas
  - Areas where records are stored should be thoroughly repaired, sterilized and dry before records are returned to them. This includes shelving, cabinets, desks, etc. Carpeting should be removed, dried and treated for mold and mildew. Water damaged carpet liners or padding should be replaced with new. Hidden water dampness under tile or false flooring should be removed. Disinfectant should be used on all surfaces.
  - Inspections of the damaged area for mold, rust and other damage should continue for at least a year after the disaster.
- Types of disasters and corresponding responses:
  - Water damage
    - Paper
    - **Deterioration of paper records will begin within two to three hours. Action must be taken within the first 24 hours to prevent mold, fungal or bacterial growth.**
      - Paper records must be removed from the water and then the water removed from the paper.
      - The main short term goal should be to remove the paper from the wet environment and freeze it until it can be dried out. Freezing will preserve the paper up to six years if necessary.
  - Procedure:
    - Stabilize atmosphere
      - Maintain temperature at 50 to 60 degrees. Do not add heat until dehumidification and circulation are established.
      - Maintain humidity at 25 to 33%. Request use of portable dehumidifiers.
      - Maintain circulation with portable fans.
      - Discard any plastic sheeting used as temporary protection.
  - Assess records damage
  - Work with the wettest records first, usually those on the bottom shelf or drawer or closest to the sprinkler system or leaking pipes.
  - Remove metal fasteners or clips to prevent the formation of rust.
    - Loosely pack in plastic sheeting or freezer paper approximately 200 sheets (2 inches) in an upright position with the spine down in crates. Do not stack records on top of each other.
    - Use plastic milk crates to transport the records. Pack the crates about three quarters full.
    - Remove records to be recovered to a dry location or freezers if possible.
    - Maintain list of all records removed.
  - Small Volume of Paper
    - Put records that are waiting to be processed into refrigerator freezers if at all possible. This will delay the disintegration process.

- Separate the sheets of paper by hanging them out to dry on a clothesline, or interleaving them with absorbent paper stock if extremely wet or in bound volumes. The interleaved stack should be not more than six inches high and changed every four to eight hours. Use fans to circulate the air if using the line drying method.
  - Iron individual sheets of loose paper with low heat from an iron or paper dryer as used in photography. An alternative is to microwave the paper. Remove all staples and metal fasteners first. Bound volumes should have the spine and all binding materials removed first.
  - Photocopy papers by using mylar sheets to protect the damaged document; discard the original and use the photocopy.  
Create new file folders, pockets or boxes as required.
  - **Large Volume of Paper**
    - Locate outside sources with large freezers that can accommodate the wet records until a commercial service can rehabilitate them.
    - Pack the records in freezer paper or waxed paper.
    - Move the records to be recovered to these freezers as soon as possible after the disaster has occurred.
    - Work with commercial service to have records recovered. They will freeze or vacuum dry the records.
- Other Records:** For information about recovery of other types of records (photography, prints, negatives, color slides, microfilm, magnetic media or compact discs, contact [Suzanne Rose](#) at 615-662-4678 for written material regarding recovery of these types of records)
- **Fire Damage**
    - For charred records that are not wet, assess whether or not they are completely obliterated or just have charred edges. If the information is recoverable, photocopying of the document is the best method of recovery. Handle the records as little as possible.

Source: Tennessee Bar Association, <http://tba.org/tnbarms/disaster.html>