

Appendix: A condensed plan of action – treatment of water-damaged paintings

The following is a condensed plan of action to reduce the immediate effects of water damage on paintings. Drying procedures should be started as quickly as possible.

1. Call in the emergency response team and begin emergency safety procedures to ensure that the area is safe to enter and no harm comes to individuals.
2. Contact a local conservation professional.
Name and phone number of local conservation professional:

Contact the Canadian Conservation Institute if further advice is required: 613-998-3721

3. Move affected paintings to a dry place with good air circulation, a cool temperature and moderate RH (40–60% RH); hold paintings with both hands.
 - When lifting paintings, tilt the painting to allow excess water to drain off.
 - Avoid touching the paint or canvas surfaces or the frame’s decorative moldings.
 - Paintings can be placed face up on a dry surface, on raised blocks at the corners or leaned upright against a wall, on blocks, until drying tables are prepared. (Avoid stacking paintings.)
4. While drying tables are prepared, document the paintings with photographs and written notes, and manually pick off loose debris that may be caught on the surface of the painting. If the frame or stretcher/strainer is actively distorting, weight the corners as described below.
5. Get help to prepare the area for the drying procedure.
 - Place fans in the work area to encourage drying and discourage mould growth.
 - Dehumidifiers can be used to maintain an RH between 40% and 60%.
 - Pad unframing tables and cover with polyethylene, or obtain padded blocks.
 - Pad drying tables with an even layer of padding (blankets, towels, etc.), followed by thin Mylar or polyethylene.
 - Contact suppliers (insert below) to obtain the required materials and equipment, if not already on hand:

6. Establish priorities for the drying process: focus first on the paintings of highest value to the collection; next focus on those that are wet or are actively distorting.

For paintings with active deterioration or high impasto (highly textured):

- If the frame is actively distorting, place the painting face up on a dry surface, on blocks, and place sandbags, on tissue, on the corners to provide moderate restraint.
- If the wooden stretcher of an unframed painting is actively distorting, place the painting face-up on blocks, and place sandbags at the extreme edges of the four corners. Place white tissue between the paint surface and the weight.
- Paintings with flaking, lifting or curling paint layers, or softened or dissolved paint or ground layers, should be placed face-up, on blocks and allowed to dry untouched.
- Do not place paintings with high impasto or fine, sharp peaks of impasto face-down.

Paintings on canvas without flaking or lifting paint or high impasto should be dried and kept flat using the following procedure:

- Unframe paintings with wet supports or wet frames. Remove backing boards and hanging wire. Remove the remaining debris from the back of the support. Label the frame. If the painting appears stuck in the frame, do not unframe it. Instead, seek the advice of a conservation professional.
- Place several layers of blotting paper, newsprint, cotton or flannel sheets, or even-textured, absorbent blanket over the padded table surface and place two layers of white tissue paper on top. All layers must be flat (without creases or overlaps). Paintings with low, rounded impasto require extra padding (twice the thickness of the highest paint projection).
- Move the unframed painting to the prepared drying surface. For paintings on canvas, place the painting face-down on the tissue paper. Weights should be placed on the stretcher corners to reduce warping.
- Cover the back of the canvas with blotting paper, gently inserting the edges under the stretcher bars. Place sheets edge-to-edge; overlaps can deform the paint surface.
- If tears are present, make sure that the edges are flat before putting the blotter in place.
- Cut a rigid board to fit the inside dimensions of the stretcher. Place the board on top of the blotting paper to hold the canvas flat during drying. (When using less rigid boards, such as 4 mm corrugated twinwall plastic sheet, use two sheets to distribute the weight.)
- Place a number of weights on the board to help keep the canvas from distorting during drying. Change the blotting paper under the boards and weights every 20 minutes at first, until the blotting paper on the back remains almost dry.
- Then change the blotters every hour until the blotters are dry to the touch.
- If the absorbent material on the front is damp, replace them with dry material. If the tissue sticks to the paint surface, leave it until it can be removed by a paintings conservator.
- Next, replace all of the blotting paper on the back, reapply board and weights, and leave for 24 hours, maintaining air circulation with fans. Check after 24 hours and continue as necessary. (It could take several days for a wetted stretcher to dry out, which will affect the drying rate of the canvas.)

Paintings on paperboard supports, such as laminated card or canvas boards, without flaking or impasto, can be dried following a similar procedure. Minor rippling or separation of the support plies can be gently pressed flat and the front will rest on absorbent material while



the back will be covered with a rigid board and weights. Supports exhibiting extreme distortion will have to be placed face-up and allowed to dry untouched.

Paintings on wood panels or processed wood boards, such as plywood or hardboard, which have absorbed water, may be exhibiting out-of-plane distortion accompanied by flaking paint and joint problems. Water-sensitive gesso ground layers tend to be soft after exposure to moisture. A conservator should be called in to advise.

7. As soon as possible, arrange to have a paintings conservator inspect the paintings to assess the extent of damage, deal with possible mould growth and advise regarding treatment.



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