



Conserve O Gram

June 2003

Number 21/7

Salvage At A Glance Part IV: Natural History Collections

Natural history collections may contain biological, geological, and paleontological specimens. Biological collections may include both wet and dry specimens. Dry specimens require immediate attention during a water emergency because they are highly susceptible to mold growth. Skins and furs may require additional brushing or vacuuming with a covered nozzle when dry to remove dirt or mold.

Fluid preserved collections also require immediate attention so that objects do not dry or shrivel. These collections may be intact in their container in which case drying off the container is all that is necessary. However, if containers are broken care must be taken to retain identification labels with the correct specimens. The specimens should then be rinsed and stored in fresh liquid. If specimens are dried or shriveled, they may require additional soaking in a preservative. Consult the chart below for emergency procedures for exposed fluid preserved specimens. Consult a conservator for appropriate treatment.

Herbarium specimens require special attention due to their delicate nature and the potential for mold growth. Separate these specimens with plastic right away to prevent them from sticking together. Begin to air dry specimens in a dry, well ventilated room to reduce the potential for fungal growth. Consult a conservator as soon as possible.

Geological specimens can also require special consideration depending on their composition. Consult this chart for emergency procedure and contact a conservator to determine further appropriate measures.

Note: When handling natural history collections, wear protective clothing such as an apron, gloves, and goggles. Use a respirator when necessary. Some specimens may contain toxic materials. See *Conserve O Gram* 2/13 for guidance on respirator use.

<i>Material</i>	<i>Priority</i>	<i>Handling Precautions</i>	<i>Packing Method</i>	<i>Drying Method</i>
-----------------	-----------------	-----------------------------	-----------------------	----------------------

Biological Specimens

Animal Skins and Taxidermy Mounts	Treat within 24 hours to prevent mold growth.	Avoid direct handling. Many stuffed mounts may contain arsenic or other pesticides.	Separate items with freezer or wax paper. Isolate from other objects in boxes with plastic sheeting.	Air dry slowly.
--	---	---	--	-----------------

<i>Material</i>	<i>Priority</i>	<i>Handling Precautions</i>	<i>Packing Method</i>	<i>Drying Method</i>
-----------------	-----------------	-----------------------------	-----------------------	----------------------

Biological Specimens

Herbarium Specimens	Treat within 24 hours to prevent mold growth.	Avoid direct handling.	Separate with plastic sheeting, freezer or wax paper.	Air dry with good ventilation. Consult a conservator.
Fluid Preserved Collections	Treat within 24 hours to prevent objects from drying or shriveling.	Avoid direct handling.	Place specimens and labels in sealed polyethylene boxes with a small amount of alcohol.	Rinse with distilled water or a preservative. Store in new jar with fresh liquid or preservative.
Pinned Insects	Treat within 24 hours to prevent mold growth.	Handle with care—wet specimens may be fragile.	Ensure pins are secured and specimen trays/boxes are supported.	Air dry with good ventilation.

Geological Specimens

Geological Specimens	Treat within 48 hours.	Handle with care—wet specimens may be fragile.	Wrap with paper towels or other absorbent material.	Air dry slowly. Consult a conservator; some specimens should be dried quickly.
-----------------------------	------------------------	--	---	--

Paleontological Specimens

Paleontological Specimens	Treat within 48 hours.	Handle with care—wet specimens may be fragile.	Wrap individually with absorbent material.	Air dry slowly. Use ties to hold fragile or repaired specimens while drying.
----------------------------------	------------------------	--	--	--

References

Ball, C. and A. Yardley-Jones, Eds. *Help! A Survivor's Guide to Emergency Preparedness*. Edmonton, Canada: Museums Alberta, 2001.

Carter, David and Annette K. Walker. *Care and Conservation of Natural History Collections*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1999.

Upton, M.S. and C. Pearson. "Emergency Treatment of Materials." In *Care of Collections*, edited by Simon Knell, 262 –275. London: Routledge, 1994.

World Wide Web Resources

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). "Emergency Salvage Wheel." < http://www.fema.gov/rrr/ers_w12.shtm >.

Maria Galban
Intern
Museum Management Program
National Park Service
Washington, D.C. 20240

The *Conserve O Gram* series is published as a reference on collections management and curatorial issues. Mention of a product, a manufacturer, or a supplier by name in this publication does not constitute an endorsement of that product or supplier by the National Park Service. Sources named are not all inclusive. It is suggested that readers also seek alternative product and vendor information in order to assess the full range of available supplies and equipment.

The series is distributed to all NPS units and is available to non-NPS institutions and interested individuals on line at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/publications/consveogram/cons_toc.html>. For further information and guidance concerning any of the topics or procedures addressed in the series, contact NPS Museum Management Program, 1849 C Street NW (2265), Washington, DC 20240; (202) 354-2000.