

Water Damaged Photographs

One of the most common photo restoration requests we get is to fix one form or another of water damage. Whether its humidity or more severe contact with water, water damage brings us a lot of photo restoration business.

Whether your house was flooded or caught fire, your prized photos have probably suffered from water damage. The first rule of handling water-damaged photos? "Don't Panic." You may be able to salvage many or all of your pictures. Here are a few tips:

1. Don't let the photos dry out! As your photographs dry, they will stick to each other and any other materials they may be in contact with. You'll find it impossible to pull them apart without causing potentially irreparable damage.
2. Get to work as soon as possible. Your photographs shouldn't stay wet for more than two or three days.
3. While you're working on your photos, store them in a container full of cold, clean tap water. The colder the better. Don't add chlorine to the water, but change the water every day. The chlorine in tap water is enough to prevent the growth of fungi and other biological threats.
4. Rinse your photos in a container of cold, clear running water. Don't run the water directly onto the photos, because that could damage the chemical emulsion, causing permanent damage. Keep rinsing them until the run-off water is clear.
5. Carefully remove your photographs or negatives from the water, taking the smallest quantity possible. Pull them out of their wrappers and gently separate them. **DO NOT FORCE THEM APART.** Separate as many as possible before returning them to the cold water and starting on another batch. Repeat the separate-soak cycle as many times as necessary. However, sometimes you may not be able to separate materials without forcing the issue. In those cases you will probably have to just accept the corresponding damage.
6. Once your materials are separated, store them in water until you can wash them individually, using cold, clean running water. use cotton balls, a soft cotton cloth or a soft foam rubber brush to remove foreign objects if needed. Rinse your photographs or negatives one more time after cleaning is complete.
7. Hang-dry prints and negatives from a clothesline. Make sure they will not be exposed to dust. As an option, special solutions are available that facilitate uniform, spot-free drying when applied to negatives and slides. These solutions can be purchased from your local photo lab
8. If your prints curl while drying, wet the paper side (NOT the emulsion!) with a moist sponge and place each one between two pieces of acid-free paper or photo blotters, and leave them under a flat, heavy object for a day or two.

Even if you follow these instructions, some of your prints will probably suffer permanent damage. In that case, take them to Mountain View Photo, LLC to find out which photos can be restored. You'll be surprised!