

Recommended Wildfire Resources for Cultural Heritage Organizations

Compiled by NEDCC Staff and the Train the Trainer cohort associated with the California County-Wide Emergency Preparedness Courses, October 2020. Updated September 2021.

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Before a Wildfire

General

- “Ready for Wildfire.” <https://www.readyforwildfire.org/> Targeted toward California homeowners, with good information for before, during, and after a wildfire. Includes materials in Spanish. (CalFire)
- “Wildfire.” <https://www.nfpa.org/Public-Education/Fire-causes-and-risks/Wildfire>. Targeted toward homeowners and includes the [Understanding the Wildfire Threat to Homes eLearning course](#). (National Fire Protection Agency)
- “Wildfires.” <https://www.ready.gov/wildfires> Brief overview of steps to take before, during, and after a wildfire. (FEMA)

Collections

- “Evacuating Collections: What You Should Know.” https://www.culturalheritage.org/docs/default-source/resources/emergency-resources/tips-sheets/collections-evacuation-tip-sheet/7c76846946d640d929bff00002fd16b.pdf?sfvrsn=8ba80c20_4 (National Heritage Responders)

- “A Guide to Risk Management of Cultural Heritage.” https://www.iccrom.org/wp-content/uploads/Guide-to-Risk-Management_English.pdf A good guide for formal disaster planning. (ICCROM)

Tips

- Make sure your cell phone is automatically receiving Wireless Emergency Alerts sent by federal agencies such as FEMA and NOAA: <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/practitioners/integrated-public-alert-warning-system/public/wireless-emergency-alerts> (FEMA)
- Sign up for local alerts that are sent via text messages or automated calls; for example, NotifyLA <https://emergency.lacity.org/notifyla> or CalFire <https://incidents.readyforwildfire.org/>. Search online for your state and town/county name plus “alert,” or call your local police non-emergency number to inquire.

During a Wildfire

Maps of active wildfire incidents

- California <https://www.fire.ca.gov/incidents/> (CalFire)
- National <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/> (National Interagency Fire Center)
- National <https://fsapps.nwcg.gov/afm/index.php> (USDA Forest Service)

Evacuation orders

- Check the websites and social media streams of local or county emergency response agencies.
- Sign up for local alerts that are sent via text messages or automated calls; for example, NotifyLA <https://emergency.lacity.org/notifyla> or CalFire <https://incidents.readyforwildfire.org/>. Search online for your state and town/county name plus “alert,” or call your local police non-emergency number to inquire.

Human Health and Safety

- “Protect Yourself from Wildfire Smoke” (English and Spanish). <https://www.cdc.gov/air/wildfire-smoke/default.htm>. Includes links to webpages with instructions for before, during, and after a wildfire, and to webpages with tips for children, pregnant persons, and those with asthma, COPD, or heart disease. (CDC)
- Maps documenting air quality
 - National Fire and Smoke Map: <https://fire.airnow.gov/> (EPA)
 - Worldwide air quality: www.iqair.com

Indoor Air Quality

- “Wildfires and Indoor Air Quality.” <https://www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/wildfires-and-indoor-air-quality-iaq> (EPA)
- Tips for maintaining air quality indoors during emergency situations:
 - Manually turn off the “make up air” component of your HVAC system to slow the infiltration of polluted air into your building and collections. If you can't turn off the “make up air,” then turn off the entire HVAC system manually during times of bad air quality.
 - Keep windows and doors closed as much as possible.
 - Make sure that the weather stripping on your windows, vents, doors, etc. is in excellent condition and effectively seals off the openings around these building components.
 - If you are expecting power outages or have to evacuate your facility, then turn off your HVAC system so that the system doesn't come on without you knowing. After the air quality improves or when you are back in the building and able to monitor it, turn the system back on.
 - Remember that your HVAC filters may become dirty more quickly during times of bad air quality, so you may need to change the filters more frequently.

After a Wildfire

- California Statewide Wildfire Recovery Resources <https://wildfirerecovery.caloes.ca.gov/> (California OES)
- <https://www.disasterassistance.gov/> Follow the links to the current disaster that is impacting you. (FEMA)
- “Get Assistance After a Disaster.” For individuals, families, governments, and non-profits. <https://www.fema.gov/get-assistance-after-disaster> (FEMA)
- See links under “Before a Wildfire,” above.

Collections Recovery

Human Health and Safety

- Anyone handling sooty or smoky collection materials should wear an N-95 face mask to keep particulates out of their lungs. Nitrile gloves will keep soot off of their hands while providing good tactile ability. Both the gloves and the masks are available at hardware stores and supermarkets (in the medical, painting, and/or cleaning departments).

General

- “After the Fire: Advice for Salvaging Damaged Family Collections.” https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/fema_after-fire_fact-sheet_2015.pdf (FEMA)
- “Find a Conservator.” <https://www.culturalheritage.org/about-conservation/find-a-conservator> (American Institute for Conservation)

- “Hiring a Conservation Professional.” https://www.culturalheritage.org/about-conservation/find-a-conservator/hiring-a-conservation-professional#.W4_mb-hKhPa
Explains how to choose and work with a conservator. (American Institute for Conservation)

General: Hotlines

- California Preservation Program Emergency Assistance 24/7 phone number: 888-905-7737 https://calpreservation.org/services/disaster_assistance/ (CPP). Phone consultation is free. On-site assistance can be arranged at minimal or no charge.
- National Heritage Responders phone assistance: 1-202-661-8068
<https://www.culturalheritage.org/resources/emergencies/national-heritage-responders> (AIC). NHR provides assistance by phone and email to collecting institutions and has deployed experts to assist with disasters across the country.
- NEDCC 24/7 Collections Emergency Hotline: 1-855-245-8303
<https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/disaster-assistance/#telephone> (NEDCC). NEDCC provides telephone advice. This service does not include on-site assistance.

General: Networks

- Alliance for Response Networks
<https://www.culturalheritage.org/resources/emergencies/alliance-for-response/networks>
- California Preservation and Disaster Networks
https://calpreservation.org/information_resources/california-preservation-and-disaster-networks/ (California Preservation Program)

Common Problems

Smoky Smell

- The brief instructions below are for removing smoky smells from **paper-based materials such as books and documents** and are from the Library of Congress Preservation Directorate: <https://www.loc.gov/preservation/about/faqs/disaster.html#smoke>

Smoky odors can be difficult to eliminate, but the following measures can help:

- Carefully dust the object and remove surface dirt with a clean, soft cosmetic brush or magnetic dusting cloth.
- Expose more of the object's surface area to air (e.g., stand hardcover books on end and allow the pages to fan open; place a single sheet of paper on an elevated screen so both sides of the paper are exposed to air).
- Place item in a closed container with activated charcoal or baking soda for several days; keep the item from touching the charcoal or baking soda and check

daily to make sure there is no mold growth. Instructions are available at <https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/ask-nedcc/faqs#q9>.

- NEDCC's website has this additional option <https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/ask-nedcc/faqs#q9>: [Another] option is the use of MicroChamber® paper, which contains zeolite molecular traps. These papers have proven very effective in removing odors. Place a sheet of the lightweight, 100% cotton interleaving tissue between the front board and the endpaper, then at every 20-50 pages depending on the size and condition of the volume, and finally between the back board and endpaper. Close the book and set it aside until the odor is reduced. It may be necessary to replace interleaving several times, putting new sheets at different locations in the book. For product information and supplies contact [Conservation Resources](#) at (800) 634-6932.
- "Soot, Char Damage and Odors on Books & Paper" and "First Aid for Fire Damaged Audio Visual Material." https://calpreservation.org/disasters/generic/soot_char_odor.pdf (California Preservation Clearinghouse)

Soot

- Here are the Library of Congress's recommendations for soot removal from books and paper: <https://www.loc.gov/preservation/about/faqs/disaster.html#soot>

Soot can have an oily component that is difficult to remove. If the object is of particular historic, monetary, or collecting value, consider consulting a [conservator](#).

Reduce soot with a HEPA vacuum on a low suction setting. Use a soft brush attachment on the end of the hose and vacuum in a direct up-and-down motion (avoid dragging the brush across the surface of the object, which will drive the soot in). Cover fragile objects with a flexible screen, like a plastic window screen, while vacuuming to reduce the risk of damage.

- "Field Guide to Emergency Response: Soot and Ash." 7-minute video. <https://bit.ly/3iDUe4g> (American Institute for Conservation)
- "Soot, Char Damage and Odors on Books & Paper" and "First Aid for Fire Damaged Audio Visual Material." https://calpreservation.org/disasters/generic/soot_char_odor.pdf (California Preservation Clearinghouse)
- "Residues After an Emergency." Includes soot and odors. <https://www.amnh.org/research/natural-science-collections-conservation/general-conservation/emergency-preparedness/collections-salvage-and-recovery/residues-after-an-emergency> (American Museum of Natural History)
- "Surface Cleaning of Paper." <https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preservation-leaflets/7.-conservation-procedures/7.2-surface-cleaning-of-paper> (NEDCC)

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