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Saving Your Family Treasures after Superstorm Sandy

HARTFORD, Connecticut (November 7, 2012): Superstorm Sandy left a trail of destruction throughout the eastern seaboard, but some of the most heart-wrenching losses were when treasured family keepsakes are damaged or destroyed. Stories of homeowners finding family photographs, letters, wedding dresses, and the like abound in the news. For those who have been so fortunate to recover family mementos and antiques, the question remains, “Can it be saved?”

COSTEP-CT (<http://costep.cslib.org/>), an organization in Connecticut that helps cultural institutions with emergency preparedness and disaster recovery, wants to assist people with salvaging their personal items by sharing guidelines from professional museum conservators. If you suspect there is additional damage that is beyond the steps of these guidelines, please contact COSTEP-CT Board Members Kathy Craughwell-Varda (CSL.ConservationConnection@ct.gov) or Tara Kennedy (tara.d.kennedy@yale.edu) to receive local conservator recommendations.

These general recommendations are intended to provide practical guidance in the recovery of water-damaged objects. They are intended as guidance only and we cannot assume responsibility or liability for treatment of water-damaged objects.

Basic Cleaning and Drying Procedures:

GENERAL: Be sure to wear latex or nitrile gloves and take general precautions to protect yourself, since the water/mud could be contaminated. The following suggestions will recommend either air drying or freezing. “Air Dry” means finding a cool, dry space with fans or good air circulation. When air drying, be sure to use absorbent material (un-inked newsprint, blotter paper, regular towels, or paper towels) under objects. Replace absorbent material as it becomes wet. Whenever “plastic” is mentioned, it refers to plastic sheeting, like the plastic used for painting drop cloths. Do not use cling wrap.

For wet books, documents, photographs, and textiles: if these cannot be air dried within about 48 hours, freeze these items. If freezers are unavailable, keep as cool as possible with air circulation until air drying is possible. Expect mold growth. Since most materials become significantly weaker when wet, do not hang wet objects without a conservator's advice.

FRAMED ARTWORKS: Unframe artwork in a safe place on a flat, padded surface. Once unframed, keep wet paintings horizontal and paint-side up. Art on paper or photographs can be dried flat on absorbent material, image side up. If image appears stuck to glass/glazing, leave in frame and dry glass-side down.

PHOTOGRAPHS: Rinse mud off photographs (using gentle water stream or by immersion and gentle agitation). Thoroughly wet photographs can stay wet in a container of clean water. Dry or

freeze within 48 hours. If possible, interleave photographs with wax paper prior to freezing. Freeze or air dry partially wet or damp photographs.

BOOKS IN QUANTITY: Remove two or three books from each wet or partly wet shelf (to relieve pressure). Remove all books from shelf and pack snugly into a box or milk crate, spine down, and freeze. Leave damp books on shelves if the space can be kept cool and dry. Contact a commercial dehumidification firm if the space has been flooded.

INDIVIDUAL BOOKS: Air dry, stand upright on end and open covers gently to support book.

DOCUMENTS/PAMPHLETS: Remove plastic covers. Air dry flat, in piles no thicker than 1/8" within 48 hours; or pack snugly, upright in original folders (if no folders, pack flat) and freeze.

TEXTILES: Blot excess water and air dry flat on absorbent toweling or bag wet textiles in plastic and freeze. Briefly immerse partially wet or mud-covered textiles in clean water, blot, and air dry or freeze.

FURNITURE: Lift furniture above water level. Dab dry with clean cloth or other absorbent material. If mud-covered, rinse immediately with clean water and dab dry. Wrap with plastic and dry slowly to prevent cracking and splitting. Leave drawers in place, but remove contents and blot excess water in drawers.

BASKETS: Pad basketry with uninked newsprint, keep lids on, and dry slowly.

LEATHER: Shape, pad with absorbent material, and air dry.

BONE/IVORY: Dab to absorb excess water, and place under plastic sheeting to slow drying. Drying too quickly can cause splitting and cracking.

METAL: Dry metal as quickly as possible, using fans and/or sun.

ANIMAL MATERIALS: Air dry unstuffed specimens and skeletal material on racks in moving air; do not squeeze.

SOUND AND VIDEO RECORDINGS: Rinse with clean water if dirty or exposed to salt (sea) water. Blot (do not wipe) excess water with lint-free, absorbent material and air dry on absorbent material.