

Air-Drying Wet Books

This procedure works well for a small number of books that have become wet. For large numbers of books, contact a recovery service.

Before you begin, make sure you know the type of liquid soaked into the books. Discard any book that has absorbed an unidentifiable liquid.

Proceed as follows:

1. Line a large table or cabinet top in a warm dry room with several layers of paper towels, or large blotters.
2. Wipe the books down with paper towels to absorb as much of the water as possible.
3. Stand the books on their ends and fan open the pages.
4. Place several fans in the vicinity of the books, preferably letting the airstreams bounce off walls to deflect the force of the fan from the books, or they will topple over. The quicker the books dry the less likely they are to warp, cockle, and ripple. But do not apply heat directly – do not put them in the microwave oven
5. If books are very wet interleave them with paper towels every five pages or so, lay them flat, and exchange the towels every few hours. When interleaving, do not close the books as the extra thickness of the paper towels may burst the spines.
6. From time to time, turn the books head-to-tail to let the water drain from both ends.

Most books will dry relatively well but will never look as they did before they were wet.

If the boards are warped, they may be flattened somewhat by placing the book into a press between pressing boards for a couple of days. If there is no press, substitute paper-wrapped bricks.

NOTE: Wet books may begin to show mold bloom in as little as 24 hours. If you cannot deal with them immediately consider sending them to a facility to be frozen until you have time to treat them, especially if you have books printed on clay-coated paper (e.g. many highly illustrated art books use glossy paper).