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Disaster News

SOME TREASURES CAN BE SAVED FROM SOOT AND ASH DAMAGE

PASADENA, Calif. — Among the tragedies left behind by fire is the loss of family valuables. Guidelines from Heritage Preservation and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) may help residents and businesses salvage some keepsake items from the recent wildfires.

Cherished heirlooms that survive a fire are often covered with soot and ash, requiring prompt and gentle attention to avoid further damage. The following tips for cleaning soot and ash are based on the experience of respected conservation professionals who care for our nation's treasures in museums and libraries.

- **Safety first!** Avoid skin or lung irritation. Wear plastic or rubber gloves, an N95 mask, and goggles during cleanup.
- **Get started promptly.** The longer soot or ash sits on a surface, the more damage it does.
- **Handle objects as little as possible.** If you must move them, use a tray or hanger, and grasp them in places that are normally hidden from view.
- **Resist the urge to wipe soot and ash-covered surfaces with a clean cloth;** wiping will embed the soot and ash in the object and make it much more difficult to recover.
- **Remove soot and ash with a vacuum on the lowest setting.** Do not let the nozzle touch the object and do not use a brush attachment; let the wand float over the surface.
- **After vacuuming, you may need to clean the object with a soot sponge,** which can be purchased at major hardware stores. Unlike other sponges, these are used dry. Lay the sponge on the surface, press gently, and lift without rubbing. Cut off sections as they become dirty.
- **If soot and ash are wet** – from fire hose water or a burst pipe – don't do anything to remove the objects from wet surfaces. Attempting to remove them will cause further damage. Get advice from a professional.
- **Do not rinse sooty or ash-covered treasures.**
- **When cleaning textiles, do not unfold them – this will only disperse the soot.**

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- **Call in a pro.** If a valuable family treasure is badly damaged, a professional conservator may be able to help. The American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works has a free referral service 202-452-9545 or <http://aic.stanford.edu>. The Regional Alliance for Preservation 800-843-8482 or www.preservecollections.org has information on preservation services.

These general guidelines are adapted from the *Field Guide to Emergency Response* produced by the national nonprofit Heritage Preservation. A brief video demonstrating the cleaning technique is available at <http://www.heritagepreservation.org/>.

FEMA coordinates the federal government's role in preparing for, preventing, mitigating the effects of, responding to, and recovering from all domestic disasters, whether natural or man-made, including acts of terror.

The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) coordinates overall state-agency response to major disasters in support of local government. OES is also responsible for maintaining the State Emergency Plan and coordinating the California's preparedness, mitigation and recovery efforts.

Disaster recovery assistance is available without regard to race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, economic status or retaliation. If you or someone you know has been discriminated against, you should call FEMA toll-free at 1-800-621-FEMA (3362) or contact your State Office of Equal rights. If suspicious of any abuse of FEMA programs, please contact the fraud hotline at 1-800-323-8603.

Temporary housing assistance from FEMA does not require that an applicant file for an SBA loan. However, an applicant must complete an SBA loan application to be eligible for additional assistance under the part of the Other Needs Assistance (ONA) program that covers personal property, vehicle repair or replacement, and moving and storage expenses. There are other ONA grants such as public transportation expenses, medical and dental expenses, and funeral and burial expenses that do not require individuals to apply for an SBA loan to be eligible. FEMA will process applications for housing assistance regardless of whether the applicant has applied for an SBA loan, and eligibility determinations for applicants requesting FEMA's temporary housing assistance will not be held up because the applicant has or has not filled out an SBA application.

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